

## Fate's Gambit

Disclaimer: Only the ideas are mine, the good stuff belongs to JKR

### Chapter 1

In number four Privet Drive, Little Whining a small malnourished boy with unruly raven hair hiding a lightning bolt scar was laying unnaturally still on his thin mattress. The fact that the mattress was in a cupboard under the stairs of a four bedroom house with the cupboard door locked from the outside would have children's welfare services the world over screaming for protective intervention to remove him from this prison. When they then discovered the reason that he was lying in such an awkward position was to try and ease the pain from his broken arm and cracked ribs that were a present from his obese uncle, the place would be swarming with police and said uncle would be allocated new sleeping quarters, hopefully with a large gentleman called bubba.

Unfortunately the uncle had his abuse down to a fine art and saved his special beatings for the school holidays, no one was going to see the young lad for weeks yet.

He'd lain there for hours; his uncle had administered this latest punishment for some fictitious wrong doing on his part before throwing him into his cupboard then sitting down to have his dinner. The house had been quiet for a while now as everyone apart from him was asleep but the pain refused to let him close his eye and sleep, his uncle having shut the left one earlier with his fist. He heard the church clock chime midnight and tears flooded down his cheeks, even someone standing with their ear against the outside of his cupboard door wouldn't have heard the whispered "Happy Birthday to me, Happy Birthday to me, Happy Birthday dear Harry, Happy Birthday to me."

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Fate has been called a cruel bitch and worse on many occasions and she would be the first to admit that in most of these incidents it was more than warranted but something about this child reached out to

her and demanded she take some action. She was well aware of the trials and tribulations this child would face in later life but if he didn't get some support system of people who would show him love then the child wasn't going to make it. Fate knew the consequences if this lad didn't fulfil his destiny and couldn't believe the stupidity of some mortals who would place the prophesised child in an environment where he was shown only hatred and intolerance.

She was going to have to perform some manipulations where the boy would meet his most faithful friends a few years early, fate was going to be granting extra powers but as always there was a price to pay. Things would have to be taken away to balance the books so to speak, life was all about balance and at the moment it was teetering on the brink. This child who was the champion of the light needed to be shown love before the flickering flame within him died forever or darkness would rule for a millennium.

He would receive the first of three tonight, to wait any longer was sheer folly so with the decision made fate took a back seat to observe how things would unfold.

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The boy in the cupboard had finished his lone song but could now hear the sweetest singing imaginable, this sound was so strange it could almost be magical, as it appeared to generate a feeling within him that was totally alien, it was called hope!

It got louder and louder until he was sure hungry hippo would be thundering down the stairs at any moment to put the blame on him, which of course meant another obligatory beating.

A burst of flame and the most wondrous sight Harry had ever seen was now in his cupboard, generating enough light to illuminate the whole street, but the strangest thing was he could understand what this creature was singing.

She said her name was Hedwig and that she was a phoenix but more importantly HIS phoenix, she would be his constant companion and

friend for the rest of his life. Harry's tears were flowing freely at this majestic creature that gave new meaning to the term brilliant white, that she wanted to be his friend was just too much for the abused young boy. He felt his crying must have set Hedwig off because she started crying to but as her tears started to fall on him a miracle happened, his wounds began to heal.

'Relax my friend as I ease your pain'

Harry heard the words as plain as if they had been spoken as his injured eye opened again, arm and ribs mended and he could breathe properly once more.

He was suddenly worried for his first ever friend, "we have to be quiet or my uncle will come, I'm amazed he's not here already."

'No one else in the house can hear anything; we will be leaving here shortly. Have you any belongings you wish to take with you?'

Harry reached out and grabbed the small blanket that he had been wrapped in when left on the doorstep, "I'm ready whenever you are Hedwig." He had no idea where he was going but it had to be better than this.

In a flash of flames Harry Potter left Privet Drive forever.

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In the headmasters office of Hogwarts School for Witches and Wizards a tiny silver instrument began emitting a high-pitched whine. This alarm went unheeded as it was the school holidays there wasn't anyone in the office and wouldn't be for the next two weeks. The small alarm did its job for three days before falling silent. Albus Dumbledore was in for a severe shock the next time he checked the monitors he had placed on the abandoned baby.

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Hedwig placed Harry in the centre of an entrance hall where another strange creature immediately accosted him; this one was about the

same height as Harry, had long pointy ears and eyes the size of tennis balls. It was a good job Hedwig had healed his ribs because the being currently with both arms wrapped around him seemed to be trying to undo his new friend's work.

"Master Harry has come home!" he/she/it cried, "look at the state of my baby, Missis Lily would have took her wand to whoever did this to her boy."

Harry was sure it was a she as it took his hand and headed towards a large staircase before he stopped, "excuse me, I don't mean to be rude but where am I and what are you? Did you know my parents?"

"I am called Cas and am the Potter Family house elf, you is in Potter Manor – your home. You were born here and lived here with your parents until nasty wizard forced them into hiding. We need to get you out of those disgusting clothes, into a bath then some supper for young master Harry."

Harry had a million questions running through his mind, his parents, his home, house elf, phoenix, mother's wand and nasty wizard were all subjects at the top of the list. His upbringing with the Dursleys had given him a cautious approach to asking questions, they invariably led to abuse of one sort or another, and Cas had mentioned a bath and food which he didn't want to jeopardise as he badly needed both.

'You will never be beaten again Harry' Hedwig's voice was in his head and the pain and sorrow resonated through every word, could she read his mind?

'It's not mind reading but we will be able to talk without others hearing.'

This is so cool thought Harry, a friend he could talk to and no one else would hear. Was Hedwig an imaginary friend? Had his uncle gave him one too many blows to the head?

'You are fine Harry and this is really your new home, save all your questions for the morning and they will all be answered.'

Cas had been leading him up the stairs and along a corridor where she turned into the biggest bedroom he had ever seen, it was larger than the whole top floor of the Dursleys, Hedwig perched on the back of a chair while Cas took him into a bathroom with what looked like a swimming pool in the middle of the floor.

Cas was adding things to the enormous sunken bath that were creating bubbles of all different colours as the water filled remarkably quickly, Harry was embarrassed about removing his clothes in front of the elf but she insisted, claiming that every stitch he was wearing would be burned.

Tears were blinding the little creature as she saw the state of her young master's body, elves are docile by nature but Cas knew she would have no hesitation inflicting pain on the vile creature who could commit such atrocities against an orphaned child. She helped her master into the bath and very gently washed his hair, feeling the bumps and lumps of many beatings. Cas left to prepare supper, which would have to be light due to his malnourishment and include a couple of potions to build up his strength to where it should be for his age. The loyal elf swore that anyone wanting to harm her young master was going to have to kill her first, how any animal could treat a youngling in that manner was beyond her understanding.

Harry had no idea what Cas had put in the water but it relieved his aches and pains to the point where he almost fell asleep, only the anticipation of the promised food kept him awake. There was hot fluffy towels waiting for him as he left the bath and a pair of deep red pyjamas that had a kind of cross between a lion and an eagle emblem on the pocket, they were also made of silk and actually fitted him.

Cas had set a table up in his room but he had to drink some potions before being allowed his broth and freshly baked bread, after eating every morsel he was tucked into a four-poster bed that could have held six uncle Vernon's. Now there was a thought he didn't need just before sleeping, his aunt's bed was a 'king size' so Harry thought this must be 'supreme ruler of the universe' or something along those lines. With his pain and hunger eased and in the most comfortable

bed imaginable Harry was soon sleeping, deciding that if this was a dream he was just going to enjoy it.

When he awoke in the morning Harry was afraid to open his eyes, he didn't think he could handle the disappointment of being back in his cupboard. The voice in his head that he recognised as Hedwig reassured him.

'You will never have to go back to that place ever again.'

Harry opened his eyes to see Hedwig still perched on the end of the chair as Cas popped out of nowhere and placed his breakfast on the same table he had used last night. The aroma coming from the plates made his decision a very easy one, eat first and ask questions later. He was almost right except for the fact that Cas had potions for him before the food was touched.

The bowl of cereal followed by scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage and toast was proving too much for Harry until Cas spoke, "young master, there's no need to force it down, food will always be available in this house, you only need ask."

Harry slowed down, drank his fruit juice and enjoyed probably the best meal he'd ever had in his life. This was already his best ever day and his birthday to boot, being nine was looking like a lot more fun than eight.

"I have left clothes on your bed for you to wear; they were your father's that I have resized to fit until we can go shopping. Get changed then we will head down to the library and hopefully all your questions will be answered." Cas disappeared right in front of Harry's eyes but he was just too shocked to even notice, he was wearing his father's pyjamas and now going to put on his clothes. A warm glow spread throughout his entire body at the thought of coming into contact with something his father had worn, denying him knowledge of his parents probably hurt more over the years than the beatings from the hungry hippo.

He got dressed and when Hedwig said she would meet him down there he opened the room door to find Cas waiting on him, she took

his hand and lead him down the wide staircase. Harry hadn't been paying much attention last night but this morning he was wide awake, this house looked and felt more like a palace than was more beautiful than he had words to describe. According to Cas this was his home but whoever lived here must be very rich so there had to be a mistake somewhere because he didn't have two pennies to his name.

They arrived at an enormous library which had a reading area with tables and chairs but was dominated by a fireplace an adult could have walked into; above this was a painting of an older couple who looked vaguely familiar. Harry's heart almost stopped beating when the gentleman in the picture not only moved, but also actually spoke to him.

"Hello Harry, I'm your grandfather, Jonathon Potter and this lovely young lady beside me is Martha, your grandmother."

Harry's first instinct was to run away but the sight of Cas and Hedwig both acting as if a painting talking to you was an everyday occurrence held him in place, he trusted both of them to save him from any harm therefore he couldn't be in any danger.

If nothing else Harry Potter was a polite young man, "Hello sir, I've never spoken to a painting before or knew that it was even possible to do so. I'm very pleased to meet you but was wondering if you could tell me what's going on? I've been told my parents were worthless layabouts who were killed in a car crash yet Cas says this house is mine, how is that possible?"

Jonathon had his arm round an upset Martha, "Harry you were never meant to end up at that house and you will definitely not be going back. The Potters are a noble and ancient family; we are also quite a wealthy family as you can see from looking around. You my boy are the last of the Potters and because of this will inherit everything, including the title of Lord Potter on your eleventh birthday which if I'm not mistaken is two years to the day."

"Happy Birthday Harry" said his grandmother making Harry smile, he wasn't sure if it was because of his first 'happy birthday' ever or the fact that he had grandparents, even if they were a painting.

"Harry we have lots to tell you but the most important thing at the moment is that magic is real and you are a wizard."

Harry was deeper in thought than any nine –year –old had ever been, from his point of view he had two options. He could choose not to believe in magic, go back to his cupboard and spend the rest of his life dodging hungry hippo junior and his bully mates. The other option was to believe in magic, be very rich Lord Potter and live in this fabulous mansion. His choice was obvious, I do believe in magic, I do believe in magic, I do, I do, I do!

The fact that he was having a conversation with a painting and had a house elf at one side of him with his phoenix on the other might also have influenced his decision.

"Ok grandfather, I'm a wizard but what does that mean?"

"It means you can do magic my boy, place your hand on the crest in the centre of the fireplace and say 'open', this will only work for a Potter."

Harry did as he was asked and a large panel opened at the side of the fireplace, it had racks of sticks along the wall but he could feel a deep red one almost call to him. He reached out his hand and the stick flew into his grasp.

"Wow, Harry I think you are going to be more powerful than even we thought you were, that's a redwood and phoenix feather combination that would take a lot of power to use never mind wandlessly summon as a nine-year-old." Jonathon was impressed.

As the wand flew into his hand Harry felt more alive than at any time previously in his short life, he felt power just wash over him as the wand chose its wizard. Sparks of every colour shot out the end and formed pretty patterns in the air, Harry hadn't said a word as the wand hummed in his hand, fine tuning itself with its master.

"Harry I want you to try a very simple spell." Martha gave Jonathon a look that clearly indicated she thought he was pushing the boy,

Jonathon just ignored her though knew there would be a price to be paid later.

"You hold your wand up and say 'lumos' and a bright light should shine out from your wand, to end the spell the word is 'nox.' Do you want to give it a try?"

Give a nine-year-old boy a wand and ask him if he wanted to try magic, doh! Harry held his wand out and spoke very clearly, "Lumos."

The light pouring out of the wand tip illuminated the whole room, he very quickly spoke the off command 'Nox' before turning to the portrait, "did I do it right? Is that what's supposed to happen?"

Jonathon was beaming, he'd never seen a more powerful first spell, his grandson was going to be a very powerful wizard. "Harry that was brilliant now take a seat and we can have a chat, let's see how many of those questions of yours we can answer."

They talked for hours with Cas eventually bringing Harry's lunch into the library, he learned about his parents, muggles and magic as well as a hundred other things that he was never allowed to ask the Dursleys. He was also pleased to discover that part of the manor was fitted out for muggle appliances with TV and telephone already installed. His gran couldn't help but notice the sadness in his face when she commented that this would allow him to bring his muggle friends over.

"I don't have any friends' gran, my cousin and his gang used to beat up anyone who spoke to me."

"Jonathon we simply have to do something about those people, I will not have my grandson mistreated and let the people responsible escape punishment."

"There is a way but we would need Cas to help, and probably Harry too."

The little house elf replied immediately, "I will do anything I can to help master Harry, if bad man gets punished Cas would be very happy house elf."

"What did you have in mind granddad?" Harry asked.

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The person writing down the details thought that the caller must have been really nervous to make her voice that squeaky, she had no idea that the caller was a house elf and that a nine-year-old wizard had to hold the phone for her to speak into.

"Let me just check if I've got all the details down correctly, you think a child in your street is being abused by his uncle and the boy hasn't been seen for over a week. The boys name is Harry Potter and he lives with the Dursleys at number 4 Privet Drive."

The squeaky voice confirmed this was correct and promptly hung up, the details were placed on a code red form and passed immediately to the social work department with the recommendation that they take a police escort for their inspection, the caller had said that the uncle had a violent temper.

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The young boy wearing the baseball cap clung to his elf like a security blanket, Harry had never been anywhere and the sights, sounds and aromas of Diagon Alley were pushing him towards sensory overload. Only Cas's hand held tightly in his and her continual explanation of everything they saw kept Harry from curling into a ball and shutting down.

The magical animal menagerie had rats that tap danced, snakes that spoke to him and owls of every shape, size and colour, they bought a perch for Hedwig and Harry watched in amazement as it disappeared into a shopping bag that Cas explained would easily hold all their shopping today.

The next stop was for clothes where he stood on a small platform and had every part of his body measured at least twice by a floating tape measure as Cas asked for sizing charms to be added on everything as he would be doing a bit of growing.

When they left the shop Harry felt a strange need to go down a specific side-alley and dragged Cas along with him where they found a little blond girl sitting on a doorway step with a colouring book in her lap. They watched in silence as she concentrated on her task but Harry noticed she was colouring around the subject, some exotic magical animal rather than the subject itself. Apart from the fact he'd never seen an animal like this or anyone colouring in this fashion, the bright and vibrant colours she was using seemed to make the animal stand out even more.

He watched in fascination before deciding he needed to speak to this girl, "Hello, my name is Harry."

Her eyes were like liquid silver as she glanced over the boy, "I'm sorry but my mummy said I'm not supposed to talk to strangers but since you told me your name then you're no longer a stranger so hello Harry, my name is Luna, Luna Lovegood."

Harry was left wondering if magic allowed you to breathe through your ears because Luna had said all that at once and didn't even look out of breath.

Cas was becoming agitated, "Master Harry, we still have some shopping to do."

"Can Luna come to?" Harry couldn't explain it but this girl was important to him.

Cas was hesitant but she saw the pleading in her young master's eyes, "She would need to ask her parents permission first."

Luna turned and shouted in the doorway, "Dad, I'm going shopping with my friend Harry."

There was a voice that shouted back from inside, “Ok petal, but don’t leave the Alley.”

She turned back round to find a stunned Harry, she was wondering what was wrong until he quietly asked, “I’m your friend Luna?”

The blond girl appeared confused, “Of course you are Harry, unless you don’t want to be?”

The smile that lit the boy’s whole face was all the answer she needed.

As she took his hand Harry felt a tingly warmth run up his arm, having no previous experience to compare this to he just assumed this was normal, “It’s just that I’ve never had a real friend before.”

Luna rolled her eyes, “It’s ok Harry, I have a few imaginary friends as well, we can introduce them to each other later.”

He was skipping along the street, hand in hand with his first ever friend as they finished their shopping, Harry was thinking this day couldn’t get any better when Cas pointed them in the direction of the ice cream parlour and proved him wrong.

When the beautiful ice cream sundae was placed in front of him Harry had tears in his eyes, Luna’s question of ‘why was he crying’ brought a whispered response, “This is the best birthday I’ve ever had!”

The little blond girl kissed his cheek, “Happy birthday Harry, I wish I had known and I could have made you something, even if it was only a card.”

Harry was now blushing furiously, “That would have been nice, I’ve never had a card before.”

Luna squeezed his hand that they’d yet to let go since they met, Harry was quite happy to eat his ice cream using his left hand, “I will make you a card for the next time we meet, we will meet again won’t we?”

He was enthusiastically nodding his head, “Oh yes, I want to see you again tomorrow.”

“Harry I’m sorry but I spend one day at my dad’s office and one day at home where mummy works, I can meet you the day after if you want?” Harry could only nod, wearing what had quickly become his ‘Luna smile’.

Cas hated to break this up but they still had things to do, “Master Harry we still have things to buy from the muggle world.”

They took Luna back to her dad’s office and promised each other they would meet again the day after tomorrow, Luna thought that would give her time to work on her parents to get the ‘remain in the alley’ restriction lifted.

As Harry and a glamour wearing Cas were heading into the muggle world two social workers accompanied by a pair of police officers were ringing the doorbell of number four Privet Drive.

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Petunia Dursley almost wet herself when she saw who had rang their doorbell but all her bodily fluids turned to ice as the reason they were on her doorstep penetrated her brain.

“Mrs Petunia Dursley? We’re here today to perform a welfare assessment on your nephew Harry Potter, we received a worrying phone call and are required by law to follow it up with an investigation.” Police sergeant John Crow was an old hand at this, even though his woman’s reactions were screaming at him that something was wrong he remained professional, if they’d hurt this kid they were going down. “I’m sure it’s nothing but we must speak with the boy so we can log the call off as a hoax.”

Petunia was panicking, “Sorry officer but he’s not home at the moment.”

A child's voice shouted through from what appeared to be the kitchen, "Mum, you know daddy said the freak had to stay in his cupboard for at least two days, he'll be angry if he finds out you let him out."

The four pushed by the mortified woman to find a child sitting at the kitchen table, munching away as if auditioning for a part in a nursery rhyme, only this time it was Humpty's parents who were going to take the fall.

Alice Jenkins had been a social worker for twelve years, she was there specifically because the call had mentioned the boy was being abused by his uncle therefore there was more chance he would talk to a friendly female face. She wasn't just there because she was female though as Alice just happened to be bloody good at her job.

She sat and began a conversation with the still eating human waste disposal unit, "Hello son, what's your name?"

The word 'Dudley' emerged between layers of the chocolate cake he was currently trying to swallow.

Alice continued pleasantly, "Dudley do you know where Harry is?"

The boy seemed to struggle though not with whether he should answer, more like the simple question had thrown him, "Well he should be in his cupboard but mum said he was out so I'm not sure."

Alice was used to keeping her voice pleasant while her insides were in turmoil, she was getting really strong vibes that this could be a bad one, "Where is this cupboard Dudley?"

A chocolate coated finger pointed out the door at the cupboard under the stairs that they could all see had a padlock on it, Petunia had finally recovered from her shock and was about to tell Dudley not to answer anymore questions when she found her arm gripped by the rather large police sergeant who frogmarched her out the door and directly to the one place she didn't want to be.

John Crow was fighting for control of his temper and almost wished her husband was home, one swing at John and the man would have

found himself lying on his back. He and Bryan Jones, the other social worker had ushered the woman away from her son who was proving to be a fountain of knowledge. This was hardly ethical but screw ethics, anyone who hurt a child was something to be cleaned off your shoes in their opinion.

David Thomson had his police notebook out and was dutifully noting down every gem of information the boy volunteered, Alice really was good at this.

“Oh the freak got a better report card than me so daddy said he must have been cheating but he had to wait till school was finished for the summer to beat him for it.”

“Does you’re daddy beat him often?” Alice knew she should really have used the word ‘freak’ but calling a child that name was a bridge too far for her.

“Oh yes, at Easter I got a new cricket bat and was allowed to break it in using the freak while daddy held him, I wasn’t allowed to hit his face though.” The look of disappointment on the boy’s chocolate covered face was sickening.

“Did anyone else hit Harry?”

Dudley was doing that ‘deep in thought’ thing again, “Mum’s whacked the freak a few times and aunt Marge set’s her dog on him, now that is funny as he tried to climb the tree with old Ripper hanging off him.”

Something was bothering Alice though, “Dudley, has your daddy told you not to talk about this?”

The boy looked at Alice, his little piggy eyes accusing her of being stupid, “Well of course he has, I’m never to talk about it outside the house!”

John had Petunia standing right in front of the cupboard door, “Open it!” he growled.

The expression on his face caused any hint of resistance Petunia had to crumble, she unlocked the padlock and the now open cupboard left the three of them standing there feeling sick, John and Bryan at the conditions inside and Petunia because it was empty.

"Where's the child?" demanded Bryan.

"I have no idea, I thought he was in there." Petunia whimpered.

John took over, "People we now have a crime scene, touch nothing until we can get a team down here." He turned to Petunia, "Where is your husband?"

Petunia supplied the details as her brain was trying to cope with the fact that all the neighbours would see even more police entering her immaculate home, she only caught a few words as the policeman in charge spoke into his radio.

"Take no chances, the tip said the man was violent and all the evidence we've found here so far supports that claim, the charge is suspected murder of a minor."

Petunia was now having trouble breathing but when sergeant Crow pulled out his handcuffs and said she was under arrest, her whole world just became black.

John felt no sympathy at all for the woman now lying crumpled on the floor, after checking she was breathing he slapped the handcuffs on her. His thoughts turned to the boy and what could make a family treat someone this way, there would be a massive search with press all over them shortly but by the state of that cupboard the policeman in him was certain they would be looking for a body.

A/N Thanks for reading.

## Chapter 2

Cas used the same glamour charm that she perfected when going shopping with Mistress Lily, the little elf took her young charge first to the opticians, then the only shop in muggle London that she knew well, Harrods.

When Mistress Lily was expecting with baby Harry she used to get terrible cravings and Cas would set off to the Harrods food court for whatever her mistress wished. She still had the Potter pouch that allowed her to withdraw money, muggle or wizarding, straight from the Potter vault so Harry hopefully wouldn't have to go to Gringotts until he was eleven and became Lord Potter.

Harry was getting overwhelmed again but thinking of his friend helped calm him down, he'd noticed the beautiful cakes in the café' and asked Cas if they could bring Luna with them the next time. He just knew his friend would love them and their only problem would be choosing which one to have.

A whole new muggle wardrobe later and it was back to Potter Manor where he couldn't wait to tell his grandparents all about his day. With all the things he'd seen, done and had bought for him Harry still thought meeting Luna was the best bit.

After his bath, potions and supper Cas was tucking him into bed, "What would you like to do tomorrow Master Harry? Your grandparents want to spend the morning with you but after that the rest of the day is your own."

Harry thought for a minute or two, "I would love to visit a swing park and actually get to go on the swings, Dudley would never allow me to have a go and it looked like so much fun when I watched the other kids."

Cas could only nod as she tried not to cry at her young master's previous life, she hoped her actions today had helped pay the Dursleys back for the hurt they caused this child.

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Vernon watched his secretary through the glass partition and knew she was almost his, he'd been wearing her down for months now and he could sense it would soon be time for a weekend 'seminar' that she would have to accompany him on. This would cause her great problems as on overtime rates the single mother earned less than her child minder so a weekend away would cause serious financial hardships.

That would be time to introduce the 'Vernon Dursley' compensation scheme and then she'd be hooked. He would then play with her for a while before throwing her back, he was a great believer in the 'catch and release' policy as there was always plenty more fish in the sea for him to trawl a lure at.

It was the chase and then bending that person to your will that excited Vernon, once he'd accomplished that goal he soon got fed up with his conquest. The freak was almost broken as well, he'd written it up in his journal and planned to make sure the boy was seen working in the front garden and washing the car before his next beating, he didn't want to arouse any suspicions now he was so close. The freak's mother thought she was really something and wouldn't give Vernon the time of day but now he was beating the snot out of her only kid, who said there was no justice in the world.

When the rest of the freaks came back for the boy he wouldn't be able to take a piss without Vernon Dursley's permission, far less perform magic. He'd show the bastards just who they were dealing with, dropping a kid off on his doorstep in the middle of the night!

He was studying his calendar to fit it all into his busy summer when his secretary knocked and entered, "There are some gentlemen here to see you sir!" The sarcasm was actually dripping off her use of the word 'sir' and Vernon's mind was working on ways to repay her for that when he noticed who the gentlemen were.

The first two flashed Vernon their credentials as CID officers (UK Police - Criminal Investigation Department) while the other two were uniformed policemen who looked ready for anything.

"How can I help you gentlemen?" Vernon asked in his most official voice.

"Well you could start by telling us what you did with the kid's body?"  
Vernon hadn't caught the CID officers name but it didn't make any difference as he was rendered speechless anyway.

"Nothing to say? Ok Vernon Dursley you are under arrest for the suspected murder of the child in your care, namely one Harry James Potter. You do not have to say anything at this time but anything you do say may be given in evidence; do you understand these rights sir?"

Vernon could only nod, "Let the records show that the accused nodded his understanding, sergeant the cuffs please."

The two uniformed officers were on Vernon before he could think, never mind move and his arms were handcuffed painfully behind his back before being escorted out the building with the entire staff rubbernecking. The CID officer informed Vernon's secretary that the office was now a potential crime scene with no-one being allowed inside until forensics said they were finished.

Vernon's knees almost gave way as he remembered his journal was locked in a special drawer in his desk, this documented all his beatings of the little shit as well as his secretarial conquests and the methods he used. He didn't think it would take the forensic team more than two minutes to find it and that would be about as long as his defence would last if he spouted that the brat was magical. Vernon Dursley was well and truly screwed.

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Harry awoke in his gigantic bed to the aroma of his awaiting breakfast and the sight of his brand new clothes all laid out for him, the potions that Cas had him drink also seemed to be helping as he was sleeping all night and now felt full of energy. Hedwig sang a good morning just as Cas appeared with his next dose of potion, Harry thought he could get used to this.

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Harry's fat cousin on the other hand didn't wake for the simple reason the boy was too scared to go to sleep, he'd been brought into this place last night and immediately threw a tantrum because he didn't want to be here. The staff just totally ignored him but two older boys approached and told him to shut the hell up or they would kick his fat arse up and down the dorm.

At first he didn't believe them but a punch to his gut sharply changed his mind, he then started crying but a kick in the butt cured that as well. He lay in his bed too frightened to even move to the toilet resulting in another few slaps for stinking the place out.

A member of staff eventually approached him and escorted the shaking boy to the bathroom, unfortunately they didn't exactly stock clothes in Dudley's size and all they could come up with was a pair of greying y-fronts, an old set of painters dungarees and a massive sweat shirt. Dudley had to roll the legs and sleeves up until his home at Privet Drive was no longer a crime scene and they could fetch some of his own clothes.

Breakfast was over by the time he made it down so the famished boy was handed a piece of toast which he ate while trying to ignore the sniggering and sniping about his clothes and rather large size. Dudley didn't think he could last too long in this place.

-oOoOo-

Harry loved spending time with his grandparents, he was learning so much but it didn't feel like school lessons. This morning he learned how to make a pencil float before moving up to a floating book, his grandfather was delighted but his grandmother appeared upset with the way he was learning magic.

"Jonathon you won't be happy until you've got Harry performing stunners, I don't want you pushing him too hard."

"Martha the boy's a powerful wizard with a natural feel for his magic, I just wish I could get him up on a broom."

"Jonathon Potter, you will not have my grandson up on a broom until there's someone here who can supervise him."

Harry couldn't help but interrupt, his excitement got the better of him, "You mean it's actually possible to fly on a broom? I thought that was just stories."

"No Harry, your father was a born flier and I'm sure you will be to."

Harry couldn't help but think things just kept getting better and better.

-oOoOo-

Jimmy Simpson couldn't see how things could get any worse, the Dursleys lawyer was in Chief Inspector Duncan Roberts office and the burley Welshman always called it as he saw it.

"Jimmy this piece of shit is going down for at least twenty, whether we find this poor kid's body or not. The sick bastard actually kept a journal of all the punishments he inflicted on the boy. The wife will also still be behind bars when we hit the new millennium and I'll have the bastard's sister as well for setting a bulldog on the lad for amusement. This is one sick family and we have it all documented for us."

Both men knew each other well enough to speak their minds freely in the confines of this office, knowing it wouldn't go any further. "What's the forensic looking like?"

"Cast iron Jimmy, there's loads of it and all authenticated in the bastards own hand writing. We've a belt with ingrained blood that must have cut the poor kid's back open and the day, date, time and description of every time it was done. I've never known a child to get to nine-year-old and not have his photograph taken, the walls were plastered with pictures of the other boy but we can't source one image of Harry. We're going through the school records but even there he always seemed to be missing when class photos were taken, the media and press are going to be all over this."

Jimmy knew he wasn't going to win this one, shit he didn't want to win this one as he was in total agreement with Duncan, this was one sick family. His only bargaining chip was to offer both of them pleading guilty to the rest and testifying against the sister if they dropped the murder charge, murder was hard to prove with no body and they'd still get twenty years for the other charges.

Duncan handed him an artist's drawing of a kid who looked like something out of a Dickensian workhouse, only the version without the singing and dancing. He looked dirty, underfed and the glasses held together with tape seemed too big for his face, even this drawing screamed abuse to the lawyer so how was it possible for Harry to slip through the system designed specifically to prevent these occurrences.

The policeman was getting more and more wound up, "This is all we could come up with for Harry Potter, the boy wasn't registered with a doctor, dentist, health worker – nothing. He apparently just appeared on their doorstep as a baby with a note telling them his parents were dead and he was their responsibility. Story around the neighbourhood and school is that the boy's a troublemaker, bullshit!"

Duncan grabbed the drawing out of Jimmy's hand, "This is a boy who was crying out for help and we all failed him, I promise you this though Jimmy the bastards that did this to him are going down, they're going down hard!"

Jimmy wisely decided not to mention any deals, when that image hit the media nothing was going to save the Dursleys so he thanked his friend and left to tell his clients the good news.

-oOoOo-

The young boy laughing as he received a push on the swing bore little resemblance to the drawing that would break in the media later today. He looked happy, healthy, spotlessly clean and his new clothes and glasses completed his transformation into just another nine-year-old having fun in the park with a relative. Even his baseball cap was common attire so no one gave them a second look. Harry was enjoying himself but he kept getting the same feeling he'd first

felt yesterday right before meeting Luna, since that was still his favourite thing ever Cas was soon being dragged where his feeling was leading.

Their destination proved to be a large tree with a small bushy-haired girl sitting under it, reading a book in the shade the oak provided.

Harry just looked at her and smiled, "Hi I'm Harry, are you here alone?"

Hermione glanced up at this boy with raven hair, green eyes and wearing a smile that was too big for his face, she found she just had to smile back. "Hello Harry, my name's Hermione and my mum and dad just work across the road. There's my mum waving at the window." Hermione waved back, letting her know everything was ok.

"Why aren't you having a go on the swings? They're brilliant!"

Hermione's mood darkened, "The other kids call me names and push me off them, so I sit here where my mum can keep an eye on me from the surgery."

Harry sat down beside Hermione, reaching over to take her hand. Luna had done this with him and it felt so much better, "The same thing used to always happen to me at my old place which is why we came here, do you want to come and have a shot with me? Cas will be with us."

Hermione was confused, the only time anyone was ever nice to her was when they wanted help with their homework, when Harry took her hand she felt a tingly feeling go right up her arm and she just knew he was sincere. She glanced at the woman with him to see her staring at Harry with love in her eyes as he offered an explanation for their relationship.

"Cas looks after me now, my mum and dad died when I was only one and I was sent to live with my aunt, that didn't work out and now I stay at my grandparents who Cas works for. Do you want to give the swings a try Hermione?"

Hermione nodded and Harry helped her up as they headed off in the direction of the swings, still hand in hand. Harry had made his first friend yesterday and thought this is what friends did, and anyway it felt nice.

Cas took care of Hermione's book as both kids were laughing while trying to see who could swing the highest. Some of the other kids looked over but didn't say anything with an adult present.

Both Harry and Hermione had a great time chasing each other all over the climbing frame before she noticed the time, "Harry I have to be getting back, mum and dad will be finishing work soon."

Harry took her hand again as they walked back to the Granger dental surgery, he noticed that he always offered Hermione his left hand, it was as if the right one belonged to Luna.

"Will I see you again tomorrow," Hermione asked nervously.

"I'm meeting my other friend tomorrow, she goes with her dad every second day but we can meet the day after if you like?"

It was a hesitant Hermione who asked, "Am I your friend Harry?"

"If you want to be, I'd like you to be."

Hermione was now wearing a smile to match Harry's as she squeezed his hand before saying goodbye and carefully crossing the road. It was only after Hermione had entered her parent's surgery that Harry noticed the couple watching him out the window.

As soon as Hermione was buckled into the back seat of the car her mother's inquisition began, "What's your friend's name?"

"Harry, Harry Evans."

"Was that his mother with him?"

"No, his parents are both dead, he lives with his grandparents who employ Cas to look after him."

"Has he moved into the area?"

"I don't know, he was bullied at his last place. He stayed with his aunt and didn't talk much about it but it seemed quite bad."

"Are you meeting him again?"

"Yes, he's seeing another friend Luna tomorrow then me the day after."

Dan Granger was never one to resist a joke, "Wow, two girlfriends already, your friend Harry sure is a quick worker."

Hermione let out a whine that is specifically reserved for young daughters being embarrassed by their parents, "DAD! He was nine yesterday so I hardly think so. I wish he did stay nearby though, then I would have someone to talk to in school."

Both parents were aware Hermione struggled to make friends, which was why this Harry was such a surprise. When she saw her daughter walk away hand in hand with the boy, first chance she got Emma had gone over to the park to check on them. The sight that greeted her of both kids laughing and playing tugged at her heartstrings, she was almost in tears by the time she made it back to the surgery because her lonely daughter looked to have found a friend.

"He also told me his house has a rather large library."

"Well that settles it Emma, we better see the Vicar this weekend to post the banns and book the church. Have you seen a wedding dress you like yet poppet?"

Hermione burst into tears, "I make a friend and you make jokes about it, well go ahead see if I care. I wish I had grandparents to go to."

Out the side of his eyes Dan saw his wife pass tissues back to their crying daughter and knew he was going to get his head chewed off the minute they got home, even the thought of his wife's temper though couldn't make him feel any worse than the fact that he'd

caused his daughter to cry. Years ago Dan had went out and bought every parenting manual he could get his hands on but soon found that they nearly all contradicted each other so he'd decided just to 'wing it', how hard could it be?

The result was he now found himself growing further and further away from his nearly ten-year-old girl who he loved more than life itself and his increasingly desperate attempts to connect on some level nearly always ended in tears. He really should have expected this since he didn't have a bloody clue about women, Emma had actually asked him to marry her, so what chance then was he ever going to have understanding girls.

-oOoOo-

Luna was also experiencing parental problems; she'd asked her mother if she could accompany her new friend into muggle London instead of having to stay in the Alley like her dad had said. Her mother's eyebrows shot up and her gaze focused intently on her only daughter as Luna underwent an interrogation in much the same fashion as Hermione. Unlike the girl in the back of the car though there were no tears as Luna was delighted her mother seemed so interested in her new friend, though she once again found herself being left confused. Her mother's parting comment of 'I'll be seeing your father when he gets home' left Luna wondering if her mother had originally planed to wear a blindfold for the rest of the day.

Normally something like that would have vexed her for hours as she struggled to understand the hidden meaning behind the words but not today. She was sitting in the garden with her drawing book concentrating on creating a picture of Harry, when that was done she drew herself standing beside her friend, holding hands of course. Looking at her drawing it felt incomplete so she started drawing a figure to Harry's left, her brown crayon gave the now obviously female figure long curly hair as she held Harry's left hand. She was singing to herself as she finished the drawing and identified the figures, Luna and Harry were joined by 'Her' which she knew wasn't quite right but all she had at the moment.

As a drawing it was no better or worse than millions of its contemporary's pinned on walls or stuck on fridges by proud parents the world over, as an object it could have found its way into the hall of prophecies.

Luna was finally satisfied with her work and was heading inside to show it to her mother when daddy arrived home, her mum was very angry for some reason that Luna was unsure of but she knew it involved her.

Xeno had barely stepped out the floo when he found out he was in trouble, if the tone of his wife's voice wasn't enough then using his full name was a dead giveaway.

"Xenophilius Lovegood what in Merlin's name were you thinking? Letting our eight-year-old daughter go off with someone you didn't even see, far less know."

Xeno could only stare at his wife and think that her flushed cheeks and the fire that was clearly visible in Maia's burning blue eyes made her even more beautiful, every day he woke up beside this witch he asked himself how he got so lucky.

"Xeno I'm waiting on an explanation."

"Maia our daughter has an excellent sense of responsibility; Luna said she was going shopping with her friend Harry so I told her to remain in the Alley. She and her friend couldn't come to any harm there; you know she would do what she was told and not leave the Alley."

Maia could only stare at her husband in disbelief, "Were you aware that she'd met 'her friend Harry' less than two minutes before she asked your permission."

The Knut had finally dropped as to why he was in trouble, "No I didn't, you know I'm not great with things like that and can't remember all her friend's names."

Maia was exasperated, "How difficult is it to remember Ginny Weasley, she's the only witch for miles around that's Luna's age."

Luna decided it was time she entered this conversation, "Ginny still has three brothers not yet at Hogwarts so I barely see her, Harry is my best friend and I want to go into muggle London with him tomorrow. Cas would look after us."

"Who's Cas?" Xeno asked.

"Cas is his elf, she's very nice and bought us ice cream. She nearly cried when Harry said he'd never had a card for his birthday and I was going to make him one but did a drawing for him instead."

This statement had alarm bells ringing for the Lovegood parents, Luna had told Maia that Harry was nine so how could he never have had a birthday card? Xeno was coming at it from another angle, a house elf signified wealthy pureblood but what would they be doing going into muggle London?

Xeno knelt down so his eyes were level with his daughters, "Listen petal, how about tomorrow I meet your friend Harry and make a decision then. I promise you can still go to the Alley with him and I'll even give you money so you can buy the ice cream this time."

Luna's whole face lit up filling the entire room with warmth, "Thanks dad, I love you," as she flung her arms around his neck. She was confident that she was going to be allowed to go because nobody could meet Harry and not like him, it just wasn't possible to do so.

Maia watched her daughter and husband embrace with a smile on her face but was still uneasy about this, something just didn't ring true and Maia was a witch who trusted her instincts. She was happy enough that her husband could check this Harry out but was planning on popping by Xeno's office later to meet him when the kids returned. She wouldn't be totally happy until she'd got a look at this boy for herself.

-oOoOo-

The boy in question was currently establishing a routine that was so far removed from his former life that it felt like a different universe, he was again describing to his grandparents what a brilliant day he'd had and all about his new friend. Cas had his bath and supper waiting on him though Harry still refused to wear the new pyjamas she'd bought for him, nothing would part the boy from the pair that used to belong to his dad.

-oOoOo-

Dudley's life was also taking on an element of routine, as soon as the orphanage staff's backs were turned he found himself once again the victim of kicks and punches. The news reports had alerted everyone to why he was in here and as the son of child abusers, who was not himself ever hit, the rest of the kids had had taken it as their mission in life to show the bawling blimp just what he'd been missing.

Dudley couldn't believe that people would actually beat him up because of who his parents were, that just wasn't fair.

-oOoOo-

Rita Skeeter was sitting in a muggle pub nursing a gin and tonic; her reputation for writing scandal had gotten so bad that all conversation stopped when she walked into a magical bar. She needed a big story to break out of the gossip column and on to the front page where she was supposed to be when a name mentioned on the muggle telly dropped the biggest story ever right into her now seriously shaking hands.

The newsreader's use of the name 'Harry Potter' had immediately focused her attention on the box attached to the wall. 'The nine-year-old boy had been systematically and brutally tortured by his relatives for years and the police are currently digging up the Dursley's back garden as part of the search for the child's body'.

The picture that they displayed in the box achieved a reaction from even Rita's heart of stone so she could only imagine what it would do to the majority of the wizarding world seeing this image of their hero. The reporter sat there as if frozen in place but her mind was ablaze

with the implications of what this would mean to the wizarding world and her career if she were the one to break the story. This wasn't a juicy titbit of overheard conversation though, this had to be right or she would be found hanging by her neck outside the Prophet offices.

Rita was quite well acquainted with the muggle media machine and understood that anything that made it onto the box as news would also appear in their printed media, she downed her drink and made a beeline for the nearest newsstand to buy every paper she could get hold off that carried the Potter article.

Back in her flat with the various publications spread around her Rita was positive this child was the-boy-who-lived but that brought up the biggest dilemma of her life, she could race with this to the Prophet and get her front page story in tomorrow's edition but there was another part of this story that Rita wanted badly.

The muggles had no idea who this child was but Rita knew the reaction of the magical world to Harry Potter being left on the doorstep of muggles, who later ended up beating him to death would be righteous outrage that would demand a target for venting. Rita wanted to provide them with one by discovering who left the baby there and then apparently never checked to see if he was being cared for.

The industry that had sprung up around a fictional account of Harry Potter all had him living the pampered life of the conquering hero, this was going to blow their world and business to smithereens so the person responsible would be fortunate to escape with their life.

It was extremely risky as someone else could break the story but she would then have the information that nobody else had before the people involved had a chance to destroy it. Rita was heading to the ministry to use her special talent and snoop around every record pertaining to Harry Potter she could get her mitts on.

If the story hadn't broken before she had the name then Rita was sure the Prophet would run a special edition with her headlining it, Merlin they probably wouldn't run anything else for the next few weeks.

-oOoOo-

Arabella Figg awoke in alien surroundings and only the soothing voice of a young woman next to her saved the squib from totally panicking, "It's alright Mrs Figg, you're in hospital. An ambulance brought you here after you collapsed in the street, you hit your head and I'm afraid we're going to have to keep you here for a few days yet for observation as there's quite a swelling."

Arabella now recognised the young woman was wearing a nurse's uniform as the events that brought her here came back into focus.

She had completely missed the arrests but the next morning noticed all the people gathering outside the Dursley's house, she hastily approached to try and find out what was going on. Arabella couldn't understand the people entering number four clad totally in white with even their mouths covered but what really got her attention was a few of them were carrying spades.

"Any idea what's going on?" she asked the woman who was now standing next to her.

"They think that Dursley buried the boy in the back garden so they're digging it up looking for the body, that poor little Harry and on his ninth birthday too!"

Arabella remembered no more as she'd collapsed on the spot; she now lay in her hospital bed with tears running down her cheeks while whispering to herself.

"Albus you stupid old bastard, I warned you, I warned you, I warned you..."

A/N thanks for reading.

## Chapter 3

Rita had chills travelling up her spine while sweat was running off her forehead and the only thing stopping the witch heading straight for St Mungo's was she knew exactly what was promoting these symptoms. When she'd first sneaked into the ministry the reporter had expected to find some clerk responsible for the fatal error, at best some mid-level bureaucrat with his head stuck up his arse, but this was beyond her wildest dreams. Any story on the boy-who-lived was always going to feature he-who-must-not-be-named but when you could also tie Albus Dumbledore into the mix then you had the holy trinity of journalism.

Every document pertaining to Harry Potter, including his parents will, were sealed by the order of Chief Warlock Dumbledore. The information that was producing her fluxuations in temperature though was the ultimate weapon for bringing the great man crashing down to earth from the tall pedestal on which he'd been placed.

At the meeting of the Wizengamot directly after those fateful events of Halloween, Dumbledore had used every means at his disposal to lock everything down and then announced to the members that he had placed Harry Potter somewhere that evil couldn't reach the boy. Despite repeated protests and objections the old wizard had just rode roughshod over the entire Wizengamot and ministry, eventually getting reluctant approval because there were still currently members of both organizations being questioned as suspected death eaters. Were there deals done that let those prominent death eaters walk free with that ludicrous 'I was under the imperious curse' excuse without even lifting up their sleeves?

She, Rita Skeeter was going to break the news that Harry Potter, defeater of the dark lord was tortured and beaten to death by the muggles that Albus Dumbledore had personally entrusted with his care after promising the Wizengamot and ministry this was the safest option for the child.

She wasn't sure if the giddy feeling was due to fatigue or excitement but she planned to go home, take a pepper-up potion and write the story that would have her name in every wizarding home in Britain, no

this story would reverberate around the word, Rita Skeeter was going global!

-oOoOo-

Jonathon could tell he didn't have his grandson's full attention this morning, the poor boy kept one eye on the clock practically willing it to move forward until it was time to meet his friend.

"Harry watching the clock won't make it go any faster, try and concentrate on what you're doing and forget about that."

"I'm sorry granddad but I've never had friends before or places to go and I feel so full of energy I could just burst."

Martha couldn't help but smile at her wonderful grandson, "Jonathon enough with the lessons today, let's just sit and have a chat with Harry. What are you planning to do with Luna today?"

"Well gran the Alley is great but London is this whole other world, I've seen things in picture books and on the telly that I really want to see for myself. If Luna is allowed I'm hoping that we can spend the day exploring together, finding out new stuff is so much better when you've got a friend with you."

"Remember you have to be careful Harry, you're Harry Evans who stays with his grandparents," Martha's smile hid the concern she was feeling but the lad had been dealt such a bad life she couldn't begrudge him this happiness.

"I remember gran, I've got Cas there to look after me and if I run into real trouble Hedwig would get us out." At the mention of her name the large bird flamed into the room and landed gently on her companion's shoulder. She sang such a wondrous song while Harry gently petted her, there were no words but the message was clear, no harm would come to Harry while Hedwig was near.

Harry almost sprinted down the side alley when he caught sight of Luna waiting for him; their hands were joined before they even got a chance to say hi.

"Harry my dad wants to meet you and Cas before giving permission to leave the Alley, is that ok?"

Harry gave her hand a reassuring squeeze, "Of course it's ok, as long as we can still spend time together if he says no."

Luna was beaming, "He said that we could at least spend the day in the Alley." Harry now knew how Cas felt as Luna dragged him up the stairs to meet her father.

Harry's first thought was that Luna's dad was colour blind, he'd never seen anyone trying to wear purple, green, yellow and pink all at the same time before. He really was a colourful character, Harry offered his hand as he'd been taught, "Hello sir, I'm Harry Evans, Luna's friend and this is Cas."

Xeno was impressed with the boy's manners, a lot of these rich young purebloods thought saying the right words with a sneer was sufficient in their dealings with lower beings than themselves. If he had to use one word to describe this boy it would be sincere and introducing his elf as though she wasn't a slave had the editor's jaw dropping before he quickly recovered and shook the offered hand.

"Pleased to meet you Harry, I'm Xeno Lovegood and I just wanted to check a few details before considering my daughter's request. Why do you want to take Luna into the muggle world and what do you plan to do there?" Xeno tried to reign in his laughter at the absurdity of interviewing a nine-year-old and asking his intentions towards his daughter.

"Sir we plan nothing more than some sightseeing, shopping and lunch, Cas will be with us at all times and can use a charm to blend in."

Cas changed her form to put the concerned parent's mind at rest, "My former mistress was muggle born and I used to accompany her into their world so am aware of muggle habits and customs. We don't plan on doing anything too adventurous though I'm sure both the children will enjoy it."

Xeno thought it must be his day for shocks, the elf had transformed into an attractive young woman whose speech and mannerisms changed to match her new appearance. He had no idea of the hours Lily had spent gently working with Cas to imprint these things onto her form, the elf worshiped her former mistress and their ‘girl’s shopping outings’ were the happiest times of her life. She loved her young master just as much and nothing was ever going to harm him again while Cas drew breath.

The parent in Xeno watched this boy standing holding his daughter’s hand as both pleaded with their eyes for a positive answer from him, his years of experience in journalism had made Xeno a good judge of character and everything was telling him this was a good kid. His mind was made up and anyway, even Maia wouldn’t be able to stand up to the puppy dog looks coming from both of them.

“Ok but remember and be back here for five.”

Another big hug from his ecstatic daughter before she nearly pulled the poor lad’s arm out its socket as she dragged him out the door.

-oOoO-

Rita ignored the two laughing kids as she pushed her way through the Leaky Cauldron, the reporter was so focused on the story she had written that the subject of the story just walked passed her completely unnoticed.

Peter White had been editor of the Prophet for nine year and was used to his reporters proclaiming they had the scoop of the century, it happened at least once a week. Rita on the other hand didn’t say a word, she just placed the story on the centre of his incredibly tidy desk then stood there silently waiting on his response.

Peter thought this was a novel approach so decided to give her the benefit of the doubt, he opened the file and was on his feet in a flash. The headline and accompanying drawing had his eyes burrowing into Rita’s soul searching for answers.

"Every word can be verified but this is all over the muggle media, it will break very shortly so we only have a matter of hours at best before someone else picks this up. I spent the night in the ministry doing my research and every fact there is true. We get to break the news about the boy's murder and bring down Dumbledore, possibly even some in the ministry at the same time.

Peter's newspaper mind was weighing up the possibilities here, the file included the muggle newspapers so he could tell this was genuine. There was absolutely no bloody chance that Peter White was not going to print this, he was just running through the ramifications in his head. The 'no body' angle bothered him until it hit the editor like a bludger, if the boy was still alive then that was an even bigger story and big stories sold papers.

"Rita I'm going for a special edition but want you to use you're wonderful abilities to get to the aunt or uncle before the ministry gets its act together, come back with an interview with either of them and I guarantee another front page story and the Golden Quill award would probably fall into your lap as well."

Rita's whole body was flooded with adrenalin at the thought of her new assignment and she now understood why Peter was the editor, she'd never even considered that angle. "Right on it chief!"

She was hardly out his office as Peter shouted for his assistant, "The instant Rita steps out the door this whole building goes into lockdown, no owls, floos, raise the privacy wards and get everyone in here. We have a story to break this afternoon and I won't have it leak before the paper hits the street, then all hell will break loose."

-oOoO-

Emma watched her daughter sit in their small office reading a book and couldn't help but compare her to the girl she'd seen with her new friend Harry, the worried mother much preferred the laughing version she'd glimpsed yesterday and hoped she'd make a return tomorrow when Hermione met Harry again.

Like every mother in the country, listening to the news about the child Harry Potter had made her blood boil but certain facts began to prick at her mind, concerning the similarities between what Hermione had told them of her friend and the details emerging from this case.

Both were named Harry and seemed to have the same date of birth, being nine on the thirty first. Harry Evans had said he live with his aunt but that he now stayed with his grandparents while the Potter version had lived with his aunt but had no other living relatives. She would have liked to question Hermione some more but after Dan's faux pas yesterday she did not want a repeat performance.

Hermione had always claimed that her books were good friends and she was happy with that, watching her daughter playing in the park yesterday proved to Emma just how much of a lie that was. Dan's gentle ribbing must have really hit a nerve for Hermione to react like she did, Emma thought it was her daughter experiencing what 'normal' life was like that showed just what she had been missing out on.

Hermione was finding it harder and harder to concentrate on her book, the park seemed to be calling to her and she couldn't understand why. She was sure if she showed her face down there today then the bullies would want to have a 'talk' with her, she couldn't fail to notice the looks they were sending in her direction yesterday.

She had more than enough experience with bullying situations to know that there would be 'payback' for yesterday but Hermione thought it was well worth it, thinking of Harry put a smile on her face but it also seemed to increase the pull that going to the park exerted on her. Hermione decided to give it a try, she should be ok if she stuck to her tree, "Mum, I'm just going over to the park to sit for a while."

-oOoOo-

Luna had questions about everything but every time Harry or Cas answered her it just seemed to give the wide-eyed blond at least two more to ask, 'why does Nelson have a column? Why are people

taking pictures of pigeons and ignoring the beautiful buildings all around them? What's a burger and how can you be its king?"

She stopped short at a shop window though and could only stare at the most wonderful thing she'd ever seen, Harry noticed what her gaze was locked on to and a quick wink to Cas had all three entering the shop.

Ten minutes later and Luna left in a daze, her sundress being replaced by a whole new apparel. She had pink trainers, three-quarter jeans that had flowers embroidered on them but it was the tee-shirt that had caught the young girl's attention, Harry recognised it from the 'my little pony' range but the glittering white unicorn with multi-coloured mane and tail was like something Luna had only ever imagined before. The clincher for Harry was 'be my friend' in bold bright lettering along the bottom, they'd looked at the Queen's house, visited Hyde park and were now on their way for some wonderful cakes in Harrods and Luna appeared in need of a seat after all she'd seen.

Luna couldn't help but look at herself in every reflective surface they passed, she didn't want Harry buying her things but the top was just too beautiful to resist, she couldn't wear it with her dress so he'd bought the trousers and trainers to match, Cas had great taste in clothes having now dressed both of them.

The little blond girl suddenly realised what was caching her eye with their reflection, it wasn't her new clothes but that one of them was missing and she would need to tell Harry when they sat down.

When they were in the café with juice and cake Luna asked Cas for the bag that now held her dress, removing the picture from the pocket she spoke to Harry, "I was going to make you a card but drew this picture for you instead."

Harry unfolded the parchment and was astonished at the image, Luna had been so excited he'd not had a chance to mention Hermione but Luna had not only drawn her, but got the beginning of her name as well. The other thing that struck Harry was just how 'right' this image felt.

"Luna this is wonderful and will be going on my wall at home but how did you know about Hermione? I've not had a chance to mention her to you yet."

"Oh is that how you say it, I wasn't sure and only wrote the first bit." She removed the same coloured crayon from inside her sock as the three of them struggled with the spelling, when it was complete Luna said, "Harry we have to go and see Hermione today, the sooner the better."

An adult would have asked twenty questions and attempted to determine why Luna thought they should go, Harry just knew his friend said they should so replied 'ok' before finishing his juice and taking her by the hand to find a quiet spot so that Cas could pop them over there.

-oOoOo-

The muggle newspapers actually printed what jail Vernon Dursley was being held in so it was a simple matter to apparate near there and transform into her animagus form and fly around the police station until she discovered what cell he currently occupied. Rita read his name on the door before passing through the door grill and laying eyes on the murderer of Harry Potter, he was pacing up and down the cell planning revenge on all the freaks.

Even in her beetle form Rita could tell this fat arsehole was not someone you wanted bringing up a child, why Dumbledore had left Harry there was going to be the most asked question in the wizarding world.

She waited until his pacing had him walking away from her before transforming back and quickly firing a few spells from her wand. A silencing one first swiftly followed by the full body bind on the muggle, a notice-me-not on the cell door and she was ready to go.

Floating the walrus onto the bed she very carefully placed three drops of Veritaserum on his tongue before beginning her interview, less than fifteen minutes later and she was packing her parchment and

quills away. A quick Obliviate and Finite Incantatem allowed the reporter to apparate away with no one any the wiser which was rather unfortunate for Vernon.

The minute the news broke the ministry sent a team of aurors to do the exact same thing, the unfortunate part for Vernon was that Rita had used all the Veritaserum that a muggle's system could handle in one day. When the aurors gave him another dose the amount now in his bloodstream acted as a neurotoxin. Vernon frothed at the mouth while thrashing on the floor in agony before breathing his last breath two minutes later in front of the shocked and helpless aurors.

His death would be documented as a massive stroke accredited to obesity and the stress of his situation with no one really mourning his passing, the aurors had planned to question Petunia next but abandoned the operation leaving the ministry of magic relying on the prophet as its only source of information.

-oOoO-

Hermione's reading was interrupted when shadow's fell across her pages, she glanced up to see five of the local bullies glaring down at her, "I thought we made it perfectly clear Granger that we didn't want you anywhere near our swings."

"Yea none of us want to catch the bushy hair or buck teeth from you, looser."

"Where's the boyfriend today?"

"He spent a couple of hours with Granger so he's probably in the hospital with cooties!"

Hermione was trying to hold back the tears but she was nine and wasn't sure what they were saying wasn't the truth, their laughter abruptly stopped when a voice behind them interrupted, "I'm right here, now get the hell away from my friend Hermione!"

Hermione looked up as Harry walked right through them holding a blond girl by the hand, he offered his other hand to her and she shot

up to grasp it. The tingling up her arm felt a lot stronger this time but with Harry smiling at her she didn't care.

"He's holding two girl's hands, he must be a right pansy. Do you play with dolls as well?"

Their laughter was again abruptly stopped but this time because the boy who made that last comment suddenly found himself knocked to his arse and sporting pink hair, the three magic users all quickly glanced towards each other but small shakes of the head indicated it wasn't them.

All eyes turned to Hermione as the penny dropped but the bushy haired girl pulled away from them and ran crying, Harry dragged Luna as they raced after her, shouting for Cas to fix the bullies behind them, he knew they had to catch Hermione before she reached the road, both hands over your face and crying was not how you were supposed to cross a road safely.

Harry's shout caused Hermione to stop just before the road, allowing him and Luna to catch up, "Why did you run away Hermione?" Harry asked.

Hermione looked astonished, "Didn't you see what I did? It's better if you just stay away from me."

Harry took her hand again, "That is our decision, this is Luna and she wants to be your friend as well." Cas joined them as Harry came to a decision, "Hermione we know what happened back there and will tell you but I think this is also something your parents need to hear as well."

Hermione looked puzzled until Luna spoke, "Trust us Hermione this is not a bad thing."

They all walked across the road and met Emma heading towards them having seen Hermione upset, "Are you ok sweetie?"

Hermione nodded but still held onto Harry's hand, "Mrs Granger would it be possible to talk with you and your husband? There is something very important we would like to tell you."

"Are you sure about this Harry? There are strict rules that cover this," said Cas.

"The rules didn't do me any good and if I can help my friend then that's what I'm going to do."

Emma didn't know what was going on here but was determined to get to the bottom of it, she was finished for the day though Dan still had two patients left to see. They all ended up in Emma's surgery as the office was too small for them all.

Cas could see the look of determination on her young master's face, if things went wrong she would need to get him and Luna out of there fast but she wasn't prepared for his first revelation or just how far he was intending to go.

"I've never had friends before or people I could trust in my life so I'm going to tell you everything, my real name is Harry Potter and I'm a wizard!"

Luna and Hermione's expressions were at opposite ends of the spectrum, Luna looked like the cat who got the cream while Hermione was horrified at what the papers were claiming her friend went through.

Emma was appalled, "Harry your aunt and uncle are being charged with you murder while you're standing here fine, we need to contact the police to let them know you're ok."

Harry released both girls' hands and Cas thought they were getting ready to pop out of there when Harry pulled his shirt off and turned around, there was soon four crying females in the room.

Cas still struggled to hold back the tears every time she saw this but the others crying set her off, "He was much worse when Hedwig brought him to me and she'd already healed some of his more

serious injuries, anything that they do to these animals still won't be bad enough for me."

Emma found herself in total agreement and knew the state of that child's back would be giving her nightmares for years to come, how could anyone do that to a child.

Harry pulled his shirt back on and both girls immediately reached for his hand again, "I want you to meet my very best friend who rescued me but please don't be alarmed."

Hedwig flamed in and landed with a claw on each of Harry's shoulders, she sang a beautiful song that lifted everyone's spirits. Both girls reached up to pet her with their free hand and Hedwig encompassed the trio with her wings, the resulting glow illuminated the entire room.

Emma had no idea what was happening but the song from this astonishing bird was reassuring the dentist that she and her daughter were in no danger whatsoever, in fact she'd never felt safer in her life.

Cas watched as Hedwig bonded the three children together, her wings were like a mother's arms protectively and lovingly around her family. The white phoenix was indicating that she would protect the three of them from now on and Cas wouldn't be surprised to discover that all of them could now talk to her without actually speaking.

When Hedwig retracted her wings all three children had wide smiles on their faces, "Mrs Granger magic is real and all around us, Hedwig is a Phoenix, I am a wizard, Luna is a witch and Cas is an elf," Cas transformed to her true shape, "The reason I'm telling you this is that Hermione just performed magic and we suspect she is a witch, I've only known about being a wizard for only a few days so if you would like to come to dinner at my house tonight my grandparents will be able to answer your questions far better than I can." Harry looked into his friend's eyes, "Hermione my mother was a witch whose parents weren't magical, I hope you're a witch but still want to be your friend whatever happens."

Hermione had always known she was different and here was an explanation that not only fitted but answered a lot of the questions about other strange occurrences in her life, she just hoped that she got on so well with Harry was because she was the same as him, Magical!

Emma Granger was a very practical woman but how could she argue against magic's existence with two magical creatures currently in her dental surgery, she hadn't a clue what to do next but talking to Harry's grandparents seemed a better idea than interrogating a couple of kids with very limited knowledge of the subject. The Grangers were very down to earth people who made their decisions by carefully weighing up all the facts, looking over their options and choosing what was best for their family. She accepted magic was real but would reserve judgement on everything else until proven, this could be some dinner and she didn't even have to cook.

"Master Harry I think I've been a bad elf, when you told me to fix those boys I was so angry at their treatment of Miss Hermione that I gave them all pig tails."

"Cas that's great but some of them had really short hair, did you have to grow it longer?"

"No Master Harry you don't understand, I gave them all tails like pigs that stick out the back off their trousers."

Hermione thought of all the crap she'd had to put up with by those boys and couldn't contain her laughter which soon had the rest joining her.

"Cas don't ever doubt for one moment that you are the most brilliant elf in the whole world," the little elf blushed at her master's praise.

Luna was suddenly concerned, "Harry, look at the time. When dad said five he meant it so I can't be late or he might not let me see you and Hermione again."

Harry wasn't sure what to do but Cas came to his rescue, "If Hedwig takes you and Luna back to the Alley I can take the Grangers to Potter manor and we'll meet there."

Hermione jumped in immediately, "Can I go with Harry and Luna and meet you and dad at his house?"

Emma didn't know how to answer and again it was Cas to the rescue, "She will be perfectly safe and may even arrive there before us."

Emma nodded and then yelped as all three children and Hedwig disappeared in a flash of flame from right in front of her. She was still staring at that space when her husband entered, thankfully Cas had changed back to her human disguise which delayed the talk they were going to have for the meantime.

"Everything ok dear, where's Hermione?"

"Oh she just popped out with her friend Harry, this is Cas and we've been invited over to Harry's for dinner tonight."

Dan noticed his wife seemed distracted but appeared keen to learn more about this Harry, "Oh good, how long a drive is it?"

The grin on Emma's face had her husband worried, "I somehow don't think we'll need the car tonight Dan."

-oOoO-

Rita's story was like a nuclear explosion in the very heart of the magical community with the fallout effecting people for years to come.

Boy-Who-Lived-Murdered!

By Rita Skeeter

It is my sad duty to confirm that the above headline is tragically true; at this very moment the muggle aurors are searching for the child's body. After years of receiving beatings from his muggle guardians, they apparently went too far and killed the weakened child.

How could this possibly happen to the boy who saved us all? This reporter has worked tirelessly to uncover the facts surrounding this case and dispel the myth of the-boy-who-lived once and for all, they are all presented here but please be warned they make grim reading.

The magical world lost all contact with Harry Potter after that fateful night and though a full industry has grown around the child's name it is fantasy and fiction while the actual truth is pure, unadulterated horror.

On the night when our world celebrated its freedom from the forces of darkness baby Harry was consigned to his own personal version of Azkaban, left on his muggle relatives' doorstep at night with nothing more than a note of explanation. These relatives proceeded to mistreat the boy, depriving him not only of love, care and attention but also basic needs like food and clothing. The image you see printed here is the only likeness available of the boy who saved us all and is a far cry from the dragon-slaying hero the best selling children's books portray.

No the image emerging is that of a child who was locked in a cupboard and only escaped to do chores or receive frequent beatings, the increasing severity of which caused his death on the emaciated boy's ninth birthday.

If your reaction to reading this is anything like mine then you currently have your wand in hand and ready to go and make these people suffer but I ask you to stop and consider, Harry Potter was failed by the muggle system but do not think for one second they care for the children any less than we do. The outcry against these people was swift, massive and decisive; Harry's relatives are currently in prison awaiting trial and will probably never see the light of day again. Muggle criminals take a very dim view of child abusers and these despicable people are going to be sharing accommodation with cell mates who wish to cause them serious harm for a very long time.

The questions we should be demanding answers to is how the magical world failed one of its greatest heroes because we're just as

responsible for this disaster as the muggle system which, like us, clearly didn't comprehend the situation in time to save the boy.

My quest to provide these answers led me first to wizarding childcare only to discover Harry's case had never went anywhere near that department, I then assumed that the Potter's will had made other provisions for their son. You can imagine my shock when my extensive research discovered that the will has actually never been read but was instead sealed by a very powerful member of our government, in fact no records of his whereabouts currently exist anywhere in the entire ministry.

How is it possible for a magical child, far less Harry Potter not to have their details registered with the ministry of magic?

The reason is the same powerful official stood before the Wizengamot and made himself totally and wholly responsible for our saviour's safety and upbringing, the words used were, "I have placed Harry Potter beyond the reach of evil" what it should have read was 'I have placed the child at the gates of hell'.

Who is this senior official who failed so dismally to provide even the most minimal care for this child whom he demanded sole responsibility for, why none other than Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, Chief Warlock, Etc... Etc...

As far as this reporter is concerned this act of criminal negligence can fall under two headings, was this a malicious act to curb a legend that was rapidly growing and beginning to eclipse his own or the mistake of a stupid old man who left a baby alone on a doorstep without knowing the people inside the house or ever going back to see how the child was growing.

Either way the wizarding world needs to examine if it hasn't placed too much power and responsibility in the wrinkled hands of Albus Dumbledore, hands that are also dripping in the blood of a murdered child, Harry Potter.

When I look at the image of that child then compare it to the one from my memory of Headmaster Dumbledore sitting on his golden throne

at Hogwarts, dressed in custom made robes and presiding over sumptuous feasts then I fear that the wizarding world has lost its two greatest heroes today, while a part of me will always mourn young Harry's passing a bigger part will have this reporter minutely scrutinising every decision Dumbledore has made or will make in the future.

While today should be about grieving for our loss of this outstanding child who never got the chance to grow into the man he would become, tomorrow should be about ripping down this whole house of cards that's built on secrecy, half-truths and just plain, ordinary lies. We, the wizarding public, ministry and Wizengamot have through our inactions and blind acceptance become implicated in this child's tortured short life coming to an abrupt end, for the greater good of the wizarding world we deserve, no demand to be told the truth regarding Harry Potter.

The effect on the ministry was like playing pass the parcel with a bomb, everyone knew this was going to blow up in someone's face but didn't want to be the one left holding it when the music stopped.

Only Amelia Bones emerged with any credit, she had aurors guarding the jail and erecting anti-apparition wards to stop any revenge attacks. The Vernon Dursley incident was a mistake and it wouldn't be until Rita published her next article that Amelia would put it together, she couldn't really say anything though without admitting they'd killed the fat muggle and that was not something she wanted to admit at this time

-oOoOo-

The epicentre of the explosion may have been the Prophet but the news spread faster than any bush fire, Maia was preparing to floo to Xeno's office and meet Luna's friend when the WWN announced the news. They were careful to cite the source of the story as the Prophet, not as advertising but to appropriate blame should the story prove to be false.

She floo'd to the Alley and got a copy of the special edition before heading towards the Quibbler office and finding a very sombre

husband. She knew Xeno well enough to know that his mood had nothing to do with the Prophet having the scoop but the contents of the story, Maia went directly into her husband's open arms and they just held each other without saying a word, the death of any child was beyond words.

This was the scene that encountered the three children and the phoenix that flashed into Xeno's office, Maia was every bit as intelligent as Emma Granger but with the added advantage here of a magical upbringing and education.

A nine-year-old boy called Harry stood in front of her with a white phoenix companion, knowing the significance of this astonishingly rare and beautiful creature her brain could only come up with one name that such a creature of the light would befriend. Suddenly the muggle aurors not being able to find the child's body was explained, "Harry Potter I presume?"

Harry never missed a beat, making the correct assumption that the woman in Mr Lovegood's arms was Luna's mum he pressed ahead, "Mr and Mrs Lovegood, I'm Luna's friend Harry Potter, would you care to join Hermione's parents and us for dinner at Potter manor tonight? I think there may be more than a few question's needing answered."

Xeno couldn't wait for dinner to ask the question that was uppermost on his mind, "Luna where did you get that wonderful shirt with a Crumple-Horned Snorkack picture on it?"

A/N thanks for reading

## Chapter 4

Dan Granger was going to be calling the health & safety people out tomorrow and have them check over their nitrous oxide supply in his surgery, it had to be faulty otherwise he would have to accept that he was standing here having a conversation with a painting. He wasn't even sure where 'here' was as a woman called Cas had taken his arm and 'beamed' them here. Dan knew he wasn't good with women but thought he could at least recognise one, watching as Cas transformed to a female cross between Yoda and ET shattered that illusion as well.

His wife was in quick-fire question mode so it was probably just as well they were two talking people in the portrait as one would never have kept up with her, if the notebook came out even with two answering they would struggle.

Hermione entered with Harry and Luna as Hedwig had dropped them off in the hall before returning for the Lovegoods, she was mesmerised by the sight of all the books and even more since they were about magical subjects. She was brought rapidly back into focus by the terror she felt coming from Harry, books were soon forgotten as she hugged her now shaking friend.

The Lovegoods had just joined them in the library when Martha lost her temper, "Harry James Potter, we told you to be careful and now we have a house full of people who know your secret, you are in so much trouble!"

Emma turned to see the colour drain from the boys face and the fear in his eyes was unmistakable; Hermione and Luna attached themselves to the now shaking boy like limpets in an effort to provide some form of comfort. She spoke, keeping her voice as calm as possible, "Martha your grandson has been abused for most of his life, he now thinks he's going to be beaten and thrown in a dark cupboard and I'm sure that's not what you meant."

She took one step towards Harry only to be confronted with a raging phoenix who'd flashed into the room looking ready, willing and able to rip them all to shreds, Hedwig landed on Harry and again

encompassed the trio with her wings as she soothed the children with her song. Dan was searching around for some kind of weapon to protect his family from this monster when the bird started singing and all his worries just drifted away, he couldn't help but notice the light emanating from the scene in front of him illuminated the entire library.

Martha was being comforted by Jonathon while Xeno and Maia's jaws were on the floor, Emma was sure the light this time was a lot brighter and more intense than in her surgery.

When Hedwig eventually stopped singing and folded her wings back to her body she remained perched on Harry, ready to protect her chicks. It was Hermione who broke the silence, "Hedwig that was beautiful, and thank you for helping Harry. Is it normal for me to understand what she says?"

"I don't know but I can hear it to," replied Luna.

Maia let out a gasp, "Oh Merlin the three of them have bonded, and with a white phoenix too!"

Dan had reached breaking point, in truth he was so far past it that it was over the horizon in a different time zone, "Ok, talking pictures, woman who aren't women and a white singing turkey – if somebody doesn't tell me what the hell is going on right now then me and my family are out of here, wherever here is!"

Hedwig let out a screech and the three children collapsed in laughter, much to the consternation of the adults present. Harry eventually got himself under control enough to let the rest of them in on the joke, "Sorry Mr Granger but Hedwig said that if you come anywhere near her with stuffing then you'll be the one getting roasted."

Hedwig buzzed around the library aflame, just showing off basically before returning to her chicks.

Emma went over to the Lovegoods to make the introductions, "Hi I'm Emma Granger, that's my husband Dan and I believe you've met our daughter. I'm sorry I don't know the social niceties when your hosts are paintings but could you please explain that 'bonded' comment."

The witch tried not to smile at their obvious discomfort, “I’m Maia, this is my husband Xeno and Luna’s our only daughter, I’m guessing you’re new to the magical world?”

“Magical world?” Dan squeaked just as Cas in her true form appeared right in front of him with the scotch he so desperately needed, a fortifying swallow later and his brain started working again. “Ok at the moment I got magic or aliens and I have to say I’m leaning more towards star trek than bewitched.”

“There’s a chance Hermione might be a witch dear so hang fire on your proton torpedoes for now,” said Emma sweetly as Dan abruptly finished the rest of his drink.

Xeno knew what needed to be done, “We have to put a wand in her hand and see if she has a magical reaction to it.”

Harry had the quartet heading towards the fireplace when his grandfather spoke, “Harry those will only work for Potters and are a family secret.”

Four pairs of eyes blazed at the portrait with Hedwig looking ready to attack at the slightest provocation, “I know all about family secrets grandad, tell anyone how you’re treated and they won’t believe a lying little toerag like you! If you do manage to get away then we’ll make it even worse when you’re brought back. When I came here things were supposed to be different so these are my friends and I won’t live like that anymore, keeping secrets makes me think too much of my old life and I’d rather die and join my mum and dad than go back to that.”

Martha was still crying, “Harry I’m so sorry and wish I could be there to hug you like your friends are, we’re trying to protect you son and you will never be hit or denied food in this house. We worry ourselves sick every time you leave that you’ll get into trouble and we won’t be able to help, your friends seem really nice and you’re going to be Lord Potter in two years so you do what you think is best.”

Harry looked straight at his godparents and in one sentence defined the man he would one day grow into, “I want to help my friend gran, I never had any before and no one ever helped me, it just feels like the right thing to do.”

Harry placed his hand on the fireplace crest and the panel didn’t even have time to fully open before two wands shot out into the waiting hands of Luna and Hermione, the resulting light show as the wands bonded with their witches would have rivalled the Aurora Borealis.

Jonathon Potter knew every wand in the concealed cabinet and was astonished at the choice and power, “You really are children of the phoenix, Hermione your wand is Vinewood with a phoenix feather core while Luna’s has the same core but made of ash. Without doubt you are going to be three of the most powerful magical users of your generation.”

“Ok instead of Jean-Luk I get Samantha but then again I don’t think Hermione would like being bald, can somebody please tell me what’s going on – preferably in English,” bemoaned Dan.

“Oh and I haven’t forgotten the bonded comment either,” added Emma.

All further discussions though were halted as Cas announced that dinner was ready and she would place a frame that the Potters could enter in the dining room, she was wondering how the young witches would manage to eat as they clutched their new wands in one hand while holding Harry’s hand in the other.

-oOoOo-

At Gringotts there was an emergency meeting and four very nervous goblins stood in a line in front of their leaders desk, Ragnok was in no mood for any preliminaries, “Report!” he barked.

“The Potter vaults not only still recognise an heir but that heir is unchanged from Harry James Potter so the boy must still be alive.”

“The only unusual activity on any of the Potter accounts is the pouch they had tied directly into a replenishing housekeeping fund, over the last few days it has been more heavily used than at any other time in the previous eight years.”

“Security was contacted about this and the pouch was set up so that receipts were placed into it and the bank would be able to provide an itemised statement at the end of the month. Discreet enquiries discovered that the money was being used to purchases ingredients consistent with healing potions and the other large expense being mainly children’s clothing. We saw no reason to block the pouch at this time.”

“As head of the Potter accounts I concur with what has been said and agreed with security to keep the pouch active but as always closely monitored.”

This put the whole situation in a different light for the goblin leader, “So we are sure the young lord is still alive and are surmising that he somehow got to be in contact with someone connected to the Potters who are helping him?”

His assessment of the situation brought four nods of agreement from the standing goblins.

Ragnok was fuming, “We will not be dragged into this disaster of their own making, the bank will respect our customer’s privacy and make no comment. In the meantime any privileges or money being claimed, past or present, for the child’s upbringing will be revoked or reclaimed with interest. A guardian has a duty of care to their charge which has clearly not been carried out in this case. Lock down all vaults and properties so that only the young lord or someone he invites may enter, pursue this vigorously as anyone who could treat a child in that manner will be shown no mercy from a goblin.”

All four nodded in agreement before bowing and getting out of there as quick as possible to get right onto the task they’d just been given, Director Ragnok was not noted for his patience and an angry director very much less so.

-oOoOo-

Albus Dumbledore sunbathing on a Florida beach was not a sight you would ever wish to see, apart from the obvious wrinkles and hair everywhere he wore a pair of Bermuda shorts that were too flamboyant even for Xeno Lovegood to consider wearing. While his Panama hat was probably in better taste than his usual attire the snowman adorned socks and dragon skin sandals completed the effect of an eccentric millionaire.

Thankfully for everyone else Dumbledore was reclining on the wooden deckchair placed squarely in the centre of a private beach, a private beach attached to the Potter property he was currently saying in.

The beautiful ocean front house was just one of the perks Albus easily convinced himself he deserved as a just reward for all his hard work being leader of the light, in all the years he'd been coming here not for one second did it cross his mind that the actual owner of the house might have appreciated a holiday away from Privet Drive.

The ancient wizards tanning session was rudely interrupted when he found himself flung off his lounger with such force that he landed face first in the ocean, it was a spluttering Dumbledore who removed the wet hair from his eyes to discover he could no longer see the house he'd been so recently vacationing in.

Dumbledore's tan was for naught as the colour slowly drained from his face, his mind was racing through the possible scenario's that could cause his eviction from the Potter property and none of them were beneficial to Albus. He would have to get his arse back to Britain and get this sorted out, events like this had to be dealt with swiftly before too many people got a chance to find out what was going on.

-oOoOo-

Events at Potter manor were becoming much more amicable, primarily for two reasons. The food Cas served was superb and two sets of parents and a portrait could hardly take their eyes off the three

children as they chatted, laughed and smiled their way through the entire meal. Harry was seated at the head of the table with Hermione and her parents to his left, Luna and her parents were on his right with the happiness being generated from the top of the table spilling out over everyone present. Dan had to concede he still didn't have a clue what was going on but had never seen his daughter happier than watching her chat animatedly with her new friends Luna and Harry.

Emma politely refused Cas's offer of wine, "We left our car at the practice and I'll have to drive back home tonight so I'd better not."

Cas reply shocked both dentists, "I placed your car in the manor garage and have prepared a room for you, I'm sorry but I thought you would be staying the night."

Emma tried to come up with reasons not to but drew a blank, one glance at the pleading look coming from her daughter and the case was lost. The wine was excellent but nowhere near as intoxicating as the smile her decision put on the face of her little girl. Three sets of puppy dog eyes switched focus to the Lovegoods and Cas enquiring if they wished to stay also was a mute point, Maia and Xeno never stood a chance against their combined attack.

"You have a garage?" Dan enquired of the portrait.

"Yes, Harry's mother was like your daughter in that her parents weren't magical and she wanted to retain parts of that upbringing in her life. We converted part of the stable block into a garage..." Jonathon found himself interrupted by two young witches performing synchronised squealing.

"Stables? Horses?"

Everyone was laughing before Dan tried to apologise, "Sorry Jonathon but Hermione has wanted a pony for a few years now, we don't have facilities or the room at home for one nor the time to take her to a stable every day."

It was a thoughtful Martha who replied, consciously trying to make amends for her earlier mistake with her grandson, "We have the

facilities and acres of space combined with the ability for your daughters to travel here instantly, since Harry is now being searched for in the muggle world it's not really safe for him to return there at the moment but we can have a play park constructed here and even brooms if the Lovegoods would supervise."

The three kids were now bouncing in their seats with excitement; Dan put his hand on his little girl's shoulder and gave it a gentle squeeze, "A library, magic and horses! Hermione when you pick your friends you sure can pick them."

Her 'thanks dad' and beaming smile had Dan wanting to get off his chair and run a lap of honour around the table screaming 'whose the daddy! I got one right.' Instead his common sense kicked in and told him to sit there and not say another word, just bask in your achievement rather than open your mouth and spoil it.

"I'm afraid it's worse than you think Martha," Maia said, "The story has crossed over into our world with a special edition of the Prophet printed this afternoon and dedicated to nothing else but Harry."

She placed the paper on the table for the others to read but it was a confused Hermione that asked the question that she and her parents needed answered, "Whose this 'boy-who-lived' and what's he got to do with Harry?"

Luna giggled, "That's what everyone calls Harry in our world, he's very famous."

Jonathon didn't want Harry to have to listen to this again, it was hard enough telling his grandson the first time about his parents being murdered, "Harry why don't you show Luna and Hermione around the manor, just remember the rules."

"Ok grandfather," both girls looked to him for an explanation of these rules, "We're only allowed to try magic if granddad is there, you'll need to leave your wands beside mine in the library."

They had no problems with that and set off with the library as their first destination, leaving the grown-ups to get on with the serious discussions.

-oOoOo-

Amicable was not a term you could equate with the dinner taking place at Malfoy manor, Lucius was ready to strangle his whining guest but thought better of that idea since it was the minister of magic. Cornelius Fudge had been procrastinating all day so Lucius was filling him with brandy and forming 'suggestions' of what he should do next.

The death eater couldn't believe that a muggle could kill the boy that destroyed his master so how ever much he wanted to Lucius wouldn't consider that a fait accompli until he'd seen the body for himself. That didn't mean he wouldn't use the child's 'death' to his own advantage and sticking it to Dumbledore was at the top of that list, if the sly old fox wanted that will sealed then Lucius was willing to bet his vaults that there was something written down that could seriously damage the Chief Warlock.

Without a body Lucius didn't yet have the people in place on the school board to get him ousted but was certain that another couple of brandies into Fudge and Dumbledore would have spent his last day in the Wizengamot and possibly the ICW as well. Unless the Potter will specifically stated that the child had to go live with the muggles then Dumbledore's goose was cooked, an emergency session of the Wizengamot was meeting at nine tomorrow morning and he wanted that will read.

With Dumbledore out of the way and the Potter brat apparently murdered by muggles Lucius was sure he could push through legislation that only last week they would have baulked at, all with the reading of a certain document.

"More brandy Cornelius?" Lucius asked.

-oOoOo-

Back at Potter manor Jonathon had just explained to the Grangers why his grandson was called the boy-who-lived and Rita's story filled in the blanks of how he ended up with the Dursleys.

Emma had been quiet for a few minutes while she churned through the information she'd just been told, "Ok I think I've got my head round that now please tell me about this bond and what's the significance of a white phoenix?"

It was Maia who tried to answer, as a mother she could understand what Emma was going through here, "A phoenix is a very intelligent magical animal that's as rare as hen's teeth, they bond with a witch or wizard for life and are creatures of purity that could never be deceitful or hurtful. A white phoenix was thought to be a myth having never been seen by anyone for centuries, they are regarded as a symbol of a pure heart and soul." The Grangers nodded that they understood things so far.

"Hedwig rescued Harry from his relatives and healed the child with her tears before bringing him here, this is the part where I think you'll have to trust me because this is now guesswork. I don't think it was an accident that Harry met our girls, I don't know about Hermione but it's very strange for Luna to take to someone as quickly as that and she's talked of nothing else since their meeting. As we all saw Hedwig has now bonded with the three children but I suspect the trio had formed a magical bond of friendship beforehand."

The pessimist in Dan surfaced, "Ok now give us the bad news, what does this mean for our daughters."

Maia's smile was beaming across the table, "I'm sorry Dan but I don't see a downside to this, my daughter was a lonely little girl who just got two best friends and a guardian angel who'll watch over her for the rest of her life. We all saw how Hedwig reacted when she thought Harry was being hurt, she will do the exact same for Luna and Hermione giving our girls protection from harm that other parents could only dream about."

Emma felt as if some things were being glossed over here and she intended to get all the facts, "Just what is this magical bond of

friendship and how will it develop as they get older? Teenage hormones have a habit of getting in the way of friendships with the opposite sex.”

Maia tried to reassure Emma, seeing her fears that her daughter could end up heartbroken over this, “The bond at the moment is one of deep friendship but as they get older I see it developing one of two ways, they will either become as close as siblings who are triplets or the bond will develop fully and Harry will end up asking for both our daughter’s hands in marriage.”

The Grangers looked totally shocked by this but Maia held her hand up to silence them for the moment, “Bear in mind we are talking eight to ten years in the future here and this is legal in the magical world, if the worse case scenario is for Luna to be co-wife to a man she’s bonded to and loved for a decade then I would be happy with that. Their bond will never let them chose one over the other and even at this early stage trying to break it could have dangerous results for them all.”

Dan wasn’t sure he liked the sound of this, “Why would it be dangerous?”

Martha tried to calm things down, “Dan and Emma I realise you are being asked to absorb a lot of information regarding Hermione and most of it is strange, there are some books on bonds in our library and I will ask Cas to leave them in your room tonight. Please don’t let Hermione read them because I think we would all agree that it would be better if the children remained children for as long as possible and we have no intention of mentioning bonds to any of them. A magical bond differs because it’s almost like you give part of yourself to the other person and you only feel truly complete when they are beside you, that’s why the children are holding hands all the time. If you were to decide this was not what you wanted for your daughter she would be losing the part of her that’s bonded to Harry as well as the part with Luna which would actually make her quite ill, the other children would be hurting as well but clinging onto each other to try and compensate for their loss. We also have to consider if Hedwig would even allow that to happen, she now considers the children as much hers as ours and as you saw tonight wouldn’t tolerate them being hurt.

She got Harry out of a locked cupboard to bring him to safety and would likely do the same if Hermione was hurting.”

Emma was now wishing she hadn’t had that lovely wine but she thought she had a handle on this, “I think I see where you’re coming from Maia but let me try and see if I’ve got it right. We have a magical creature that will protect my daughter for the rest of her life, a creature who doesn’t seem averse to handing out punishment to those trying to do the hurting if I may say. Harry and Luna will be her best friends from now on and they will all support one another with the only downside, please excuse me I don’t mean to insult anyone’s children or belief’s here is that she may find herself one day married to Harry along with Luna.”

Maia smiled and nodded.

“We are talking years here aren’t we?” Dan was struggling with this but it appeared he would have time to get used to all this before any serious decisions had to be made.

The witch chuckled, “Yes Dan and meanwhile we get to see our children grow up happier than they’ve ever been, Luna has become quite isolated where we live and spends far too long staring into space and talking to herself. Her excitement at having friends is contagious and I’m delighted for her to spend time here, at your house or our home as long as they’re together and happy. With Hedwig and Cas transport is not a problem so there’s no reason they can’t play together every day.”

Emma was thinking that Hermione wouldn’t have to sit in their small office with a book any longer; she could play with Harry and Luna all day and even have sleepovers so they could really get to know the kids. They could have so much fun and all the while under the watchful eye of world class childcare, she would just be looking on her daughter learning magic as practicing a new skill though she doubted that waving her wand was comparable to having the stabilisers removed from your bike. “What about school, did Luna and Harry go to primary school?”

Martha answered, “Magical children are usually home-taught until the go to Hogwarts school of witchcraft and wizardry at age eleven, Harry told us he went to school but if he performed better than his cousin then he got beaten by his uncle.”

“I would be delighted if Luna could go to school with Harry and Hermione, with both of them there to look out for her she should be fine and it’s important she learns more about their world.” Maia was starting to like Dan and Emma, there starting point for everything seemed to be ‘what’s best for our daughter’ and she could appreciate that.

Xeno brought up a few problems, “How is this going to work if Harry is considered dead in both the muggle and magical worlds? Isn’t there a chance he could be declared dead and lose his inheritance? I’m also concerned that the notion he was murdered by a muggle could be used to push legislation through the Wizengamot giving non-purebloods even less rights.”

Dan was shaking his head, “Sorry people we’ve had quite the night here and I don’t think our brains are up to wizarding politics as well.”

Jonathon actually laughed, “I was never up to it either and I was on the Wizengamot! The Potter vaults will know Harry is still alive so the bank won’t be a problem, I will not have my grandson being used as someone’s political pawn. He will stay away until he’s eleven and takes on the mantle of Lord Potter, at that point he legally doesn’t require a guardian in the magical world. In the muggle world he can be Harry Evans with Cas acting as his guardian and her magic producing any documents needed.”

Cas moved them back into the library for coffee where both mothers sat on a sofa to discuss the practicalities of their new situation while both fathers got to know one another; Dan certainly had the harder task.

-oOoOo-

Luna found herself in an unaccustomed position, because of Harry and Hermione’s thirst for knowledge on all things magical she found

herself answering questions instead of asking them. All three had experiences the last few days that they found incredible but when they reached Harry's room and he showed Hermione the picture Luna drew of them it was another thing to add to the list.

"Luna, how did you know about me if Harry didn't tell you?" Hermione asked.

The little blond looked embarrassed, "Sometimes I just see things, you don't think that makes me weird or anything?"

Hermione started giggling then hugged her new friend, "Luna its no more weird than me turning that boy's hair pink today, oh I hope our parents let us see each other every day because it was really hard thinking I wasn't going to meet Harry today."

"I know what you mean but when I was sitting drawing the picture and thinking of Harry I saw you both together and it made me feel better, not as good as us all being together but much better than being alone."

Hermione had an idea, "What age are you Luna? We know Harry's nine and I'm ten in September."

"I will be nine in October, why?"

Hermione was hyper and her voice was getting more excited by the second, "We could all go to school together, my school's not great and Harry can't go back to his but we could choose a new one. We could tell everyone we're cousins..."

The 'NO' from Harry shut Hermione up immediately, "I like the school idea Hermione but not the cousin thing, I already have one of those and don't want any more. What I want are my friends, my best friends?"

Hermione took his hand, "Best friends Harry."

Luna repeated the procedure before both girls looked towards each other and joined their free hands, the trio said 'best friends forever'

and the room was lit by the glow emanating from the children. Harry had felt the tingling up both his arms much stronger this time and it left him feeling tired, he crawled onto the bed for a sleep being promptly joined by the girls and all three were soon in the land of nod.

Cas found them like that five minutes later and couldn't contain her smile; she conjured a frame for Harry's precious drawing and hung it on the wall where they would see it when they awakened. She popped away to see the parents.

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The care worker felt terrible leaving the crying boy but there was nothing she could do about the situation, she had come to the orphanage to deliver his own clothes to Dudley who was obviously having a hard time adjusting with his change in circumstances.

The problem was that the media had descended on Little Whinging like a plague of locusts all desperate to find a different angle for their story. With Dudley's former friends more than willing to tell all to see their name in the papers his treatment of his cousin had dramatically changed peoples perception of the obese boy, rather than being a victim like Harry it was now blatantly clear that he'd willingly tortured the poor boy along side his parents.

With this becoming public knowledge the boy had a snowball's chance in hell of being adopted or even fostered, Dudley was going to have to get used to life in an institution because he was going to be here for a long time. Having read some of the things he did it wouldn't surprise her in the slightest if in later life those institutions came with complementary bars on the windows and had steel doors fitted as standard.

-oOoOo-

The odd couple sitting getting drunk in the Three Broomsticks would normally be very sociable but tonight all they appeared interested in was hitting the booze like prohibition was going to become law at midnight.

Anyone catching their conversation would have been shocked, as the language got cruder as the night and volume of alcohol consumed progressed. Minerva was almost beyond understanding as her brogue was now so thick she could have been speaking Swahili for all anyone knew though ‘stupid old bastard’ seemed to transcend any language barriers. Her giant friend suddenly burst into tears, “Should just have given the little tyke to Black, at least it would have been over quick and the poor boy wouldn’t have had to suffer all them years.”

McGonagall patted Hagrid on the back with one hand while signalled for more drinks with the other, she was still aware enough to know a hangover cure wouldn’t remove all her woes in the morning but that was nothing compared to how Albus was going to feel when she got her hands on him.

-oOoO-

Cas let the four parents into Harry’s room to look at the sight on the bed, he currently had Hermione and Luna using his chest for a pillow while his arms encircled both the girls and all three children wore blissful smiles. The vision was so cute and sweet that it almost took your breath away, “I really hate to disturb them but they can’t stay like that all night,” Emma said.

Cas snapped her fingers and all three children were now wearing pyjamas, a wiggle of her fingers and they floated above the bed before the cover was pulled back with the sleeping children being lowered back down.

Emma and Maia approached the bed and pulled the cover up over the sleeping trio as both kissed all three children goodnight, Emma gave Cas a hug to say thank you before taking her husband by the arm and leading him into the room the little elf had indicated was for their use. Her voice could clearly be heard warning her husband, “Daniel Granger don’t even consider teasing Hermione about this in the morning.”

His “Aw why not?” clearly indicated why the warning was necessary.

-oOoOo-

Fate gazed down on the three sleeping children and if she had a heart it would be breaking about now, she knew that she was pushing their bond to the maximum but they would need that and more to get them over the unavoidable events heading their way. The Universe must be kept in balance and she couldn't wait much longer before levelling things out, sometimes Fate just hated her job!

A/N Thanks for reading.

## Chapter 5

Harry awoke from a great night's sleep and found his two best friends snuggled into him but, instead of making him blush he thought this was brilliant and had a smile on his face that reflected his feelings.

"Morning Harry, can I use you for my pillow every night?" Luna asked.

This got Hermione giggling, "You sure are better than my teddy bear Harry, a girl could get used to being pampered like this. Any idea how we ended up in here, or who the pyjamas belong to?"

"The pyjamas are mine but the last thing I remember was falling asleep on top of the bed."

"That was me that put you all to bed," said Cas popping into the room, "I've run the bath and breakfast will be downstairs today but I would hurry as I heard both the young ladies mothers discussing something about horses."

Cas was laughing as Luna and Hermione reacted like sprinters out the blocks and dragged Harry with them into the bathroom, the girls found themselves faced with a massive sunken bath of unknown depth due to all the bubbles present. Hermione wasn't too sure about taking her clothes off in front of the others, Harry was still a boy after all, when Luna's excitement got the better of her and the little blond witch just jumped right in still wearing Harry's borrowed pyjamas.

A shared glance with Harry and both children jumped laughing into the bubble covered miniature swimming pool, they were all still laughing as Cas snapped her fingers and removed the now sodden night garments as they continued to splash one another.

Cas pointed the trio in the direction of the shampoo and they all ended up washing each other's hair, Harry drew the short straw and got Hermione.

The elf had warm fluffy towels waiting on them as they stepped out the bath and some of Harry's new clothes altered to suit the girls were laid out on the bed, Hermione and Luna were getting ready

when they noticed that Harry hadn't followed them out, "You ok Harry?" shouted Luna.

"Eh I'll be a few minutes yet, go on down if you want."

Both girls could clearly hear the embarrassment in his voice so pulled on the tee shirts and headed back in there to see what the problem was, Luna and Hermione had to fight back the tears as Cas applied an ointment to Harry's scars. While in the bath the bubbles had hid most of their bodies and Harry had shown them his back yesterday but he was now standing naked and the horrific scars started at his shoulders, travelled all the way down his back, criss-crossed every square inch of his buttocks before disfiguring the backs of his legs.

Neither girl hesitated as they rushed to take their friends hand while Cas worked on him, "Master Harry gets this every morning and night now but you all fell asleep last night before I could do anything."

Hermione squeezed his hand, "You said last night Harry no secrets between us, this doesn't make any difference to the way we feel about you."

Luna was squeezing his other hand and nodded her agreement, "Best friends forever Harry."

All three were now smiling while standing waiting the few minutes it took for the lotion to be absorbed.

The occupants of the dining room were left wondering if there was a stampede of wild animals in the manor as the kids came bounding down the stairs and burst through the doors amid gales of laughter and some joking accusations of cheating in their race.

Emma's eyebrows were raised at the girl they practically had to drag out of bed every morning sitting here laughing with her new friends, "Ok who are you and what have you done with my sleepy head daughter?"

All three were enthusiastically tucking in to their breakfast and Hermione made sure her mouth was empty before replying, "Cas

mentioned something about horses and we were in the bath before we even took our pyjamas off.”

She ran her hand through Hermione’s hair, “It’s lovely and soft, did Cas wash it?”

“No Harry did, I washed Luna’s while she did Harry’s, we were in a hurry to find out about the horses.”

Emma could see in her eyes that something was bothering Hermione but when her daughter turned and took Harry’s hand she was surprised at what came next.

“Harry we said no secrets and that means our parents too, mum and dad are kind people who will help you all they can but it’s better if they know the truth.”

Luna had his other hand and the poor boy didn’t stand a chance, Harry had so few instances of kindness in his life that he was helpless when it was applied, especially by his two best friends.

“Harry I would never doubt Cas but mum is a genius with potions and could help improve what Cas is doing, we need to tell them Harry as I don’t think I could keep this secret from mum and dad.”

The boy just nodded and stood, with great care and tenderness Hermione removed his shirt while Luna unfastened his trousers, all three had tears in their eyes.

Dan had some idea what was about to happen having heard about the boys back from Emma last night but at the moment he was more concerned by him washing Hermione’s hair in the bath. That was soon forgotten about the instant the girls turned Harry round, only the knowledge of how it would affect the boy prevented Dan raging like a madman at what had been done to this child. With his voice barely under control he spoke, “Harry if someone even attempted to do that to Hermione I would rip them apart with my bare hands, I will do the same to that beast you called an uncle if I ever get near enough him.”

Hermione leaped into her dad's arms and cried for her friend while her place was immediately taken by Emma who enveloped the boy in a hug.

Xeno was shaking with temper, "Harry the Lovegoods are more renowned for being scholars than duellers but if I ever get my wand on him he won't be getting back up." Both fathers now had crying daughters in their arms while Maia examined Harry's injuries.

"Harry the stuff Cas is using is very good but I can brew you something better for tonight's treatment, I'm a potion's mistress who has her own lab at home and does independent research for a large company. We should be able to have those scars disappear and get you into swimming trunks by the end of the summer."

"You can do that?" asked an astonished Emma?"

"Magic can be used for a lot of things!" Emma was left in no doubt some of those things could be painful or who Maia would like to practice them on, she wouldn't mind getting the uncle in her chair and seeing how much damage she could do with her drill.

Harry was holding on tight to Emma as she gently lifted his chin so she could look into his eyes as she spoke, "Harry you didn't do anything to deserve that treatment or those beatings, your uncle is a very sick man who will be dealt with by the courts. I know you have never been able to trust the adults in your life but I'm asking you to trust us, you trust Hermione and Luna so talk to them and make your own mind up but know that the four of us are here for you."

Maia used her hand to gently turn his face round towards her, "Harry we want the three of you to be together as much as possible and even let Luna go to school along with you and Hermione, is that what you want?"

Harry now had an arm round each woman repeatedly whispering 'yes' before they all ended up on the floor, bowled over by the charging girls who also wanted to show their appreciation. Dan and Xeno sat at the table using their napkins to remove whatever foreign body was causing their eyes to water, both secretly pleased that their

family seemed to have grown by one when in fact they were soon to find out they were wrong. Their families had increase to three children as the kids would never be separated again.

They had settled back down and just finished an exciting first breakfast together when Cas popped in with another elf, "Master Harry this is Ziggy, his family is moving away and want to sell their horses and ponies, I've said we will take them if Ziggy can come to as he looks after them at the moment."

"What do you want to do Ziggy?" Harry asked the clearly nervous elf.

"Ziggy would be proud to work for the great Harry Potter, Ziggy's family only made the final decision to move from this country after reading how you was murdered but Ziggy pleased that bad man who did it now dead. Ziggy be keeping your secrets and not telling a soul great Harry Potter still alive."

"Eh thanks Ziggy, could you deal with it please Cas?"

"Cas will take care of everything master Harry," with a snap of her fingers the breakfast dishes were gone and a copy of the Prophet and the Times appeared on the table before she left with Ziggy.

Dan picked up the Times and had the little elf's story confirmed on the front page, "Its true Harry, he died from some sort of seizure alone in his cell."

Harry was crying for the second time that morning but this time it was in relief, "I'm never going back, I'm really never going back."

The four females took the boy in the direction of the library as Martha left the frame to appear above the fireplace leaving Dan and Xeno chatting to Jonathon.

"I think we need to let people know Harry's still alive, he's such a symbol of hope to our world that thinking he's dead could have a devastating effect on people."

"I agree with Xeno, a note to the police officer leading the investigation stating he's safe and we could take a lot of the pressure off from our side of the divide, a drop of his blood on the letter would allow forensics to confirm it's really Harry and not some hoax."

Jonathon considered this for a moment before replying, "I've watched you both with the children and only wish Harry had ended up with a family like yours, I want to be selfish and hide him away until he's old enough to look after himself but realise that's not really an option. If we write a piece to the press and have the goblins confirm it then that should cover the magical side. Dan you know a lot more about your world than either Xeno or myself so I'm happy to rely on your judgement, if that's the only picture they have of Harry he will be unrecognisable within a few weeks. In all of this I would check with Harry before you do anything, he's not officially head of house Potter until he's eleven but as the last surviving member of the family I want him involved in everything. Those bastards made my grandson think he was worthless and we need to start slowly turning that around, I for one will not be morning the fat pig's demise."

Xeno and Dan were in full agreement with that sentiment, the boys back looked like something out of the middle-ages when people were still tied to stocks and flogged. "I actually own a newspaper and could write a piece with Harry for publication, the Potter seal or a drop of blood would convince the goblins to corroborate the fact he's still alive. I would push the angle that he's well looked after but since both systems failed him then he's decided to stay incommunicado for now."

Jonathon thought this was a good idea but added a timeline, "If you add 'until he goes to Hogwarts' then it will relieve peoples fears even more and buys us a few years to make the decision on what's best for them."

Xeno thought that was a great plan and wanted to speak to Harry to get this printed as soon as possible, today was Saturday and if he could get it ready for tonight then his presses would be running all night to meet the demand.

"Would you mind if I tagged along," asked Dan "I'm really keen to see more magic and if I know Emma she'll be asking Maia if she can watch her brew Harry's potion."

It was agreed, talk to Harry, write the story, let Jonathon and Harry approve it before heading to the office and starting to print a special edition, this was a better scoop than the Prophets because the boy-who-lived lives.

-oOoOo-

Albus Dumbledore had moved into his tiny cottage just outside Glengarry, with everyone thinking he was on holiday he didn't want to publicly return in the middle of the night and arouse suspicion. He planned on heading into Gringotts today and sort this misunderstanding out before it could proceed any further.

The Scottish sunlight that was shining through the window abruptly being blocked had the wizard up and out his seat to investigate, what he saw rocked him to his very core. In a scene that Alfred Hitchcock would have killed to have in his cult movie there were so many owls heading directly for Albus they blotted out the sun, it was also evident that the vast majority of the birds were carrying red howlers.

Dumbledore had his wand out in a flash and started casting a spell that marked the mail as having been read and then banished the note at the hundreds, if not thousands of these things all heading straight for him. Unfortunately casting spells of that magnitude at full speed there were always going to be a few mishaps.

He not only banished as opened the summons to an emergency meeting of the Wizengamot but also the scroll from Gringotts explaining why he no longer had rights to Potter vaults and properties. The Gringotts scroll was a real pity as it also went into great detail about how his vaults had been seized and compensation paid to the house of Potter for his lack of care for the current heir. The final paragraph was a warning that he was no longer welcome in Gringotts and any appearance there would be met with force.

Albus hadn't a clue what was going on but as he sat back down to have another cup of coco he decided it was more imperative than ever that he get to the bank.

-oOoO-

Lucius Malfoy sat reading this morning's edition of the Prophet and thought that if Rita Skeeter was fifteen years younger and male he would kiss the reporter for making his task so much easier. If he'd had prior knowledge that this was going to be published Lucius wouldn't have had to spend last night in the company of that whining idiot Fudge.

He read over the article again.

Monster but no Murderer!

Claims Boy-Who-Lived's Uncle

By Rita Skeeter

This reporter managed to secure an interview with the man thought responsible for the murder of Harry Potter and while I wholeheartedly agree with the first part of the headline I will leave it to you to decide about the second.

Being a muggle who married Lily Potter's non-magical sister he was aware of magic but made it plain from the beginning he wanted nothing to do with our world. They were neither at the Potters wedding nor invited the magical couple to theirs.

With this level of hatred already well known it is inconceivable that the Potters would have requested their son to be placed there but that's exactly what happened.

On a cold November morning the family awoke to find a baby on their doorstep, wrapped in a blanket with a note from Albus Dumbledore saying Harry's parents had been killed and he was now their responsibility.

The Dursley's were a young family with a baby son of their own who had just seen their family double in size and their finances stretched even more, in all the years Harry stayed there the family never received one Knut of financial support. The Potters are one of the wealthiest families in the British Isles so how could it be possible that the last surviving Potter remained penniless?

The magical world needs to hear the Potter will read today, all questions raised therein answered and any lawbreaking dealt with swiftly and severely.

Before we start to feel sympathy for the Dursleys lets not forget the man is a self confessed monster who let his hatred of magic transfer to the innocent child who now lived in his house, Harry's uncle undertook the mission to 'beat the magic' out of the boy and spent years refining his technique.

He freely admitted beating Harry to the state of breaking his bones before locking him in a cupboard the night before his birthday, but absolutely refutes the charge of murdering the child and hiding the body. The muggle aurors do not believe this story but unlocked the cupboard to find it empty, we in the magical world know that a locked door can be no barrier which begs the question – does the boy-who-lived live still?

One can't say the same for Vernon Dursley as he died from a seizure of unknown origin alone in his cell – a locked door can be no barrier and I hope the most repulsive man I've ever met roasts in hell for at least a millennium.

Our saviour may yet be still amongst us and when I enquired at Gringotts I was told 'no comment' thought they did go out their way to inform me an investigation has been started against Albus Dumbledore, we can only hope our government does the same and determines his role in this scandalous event.

Lucius was actually chuckling, as this would at the very least install doubt into the old buzzards staunchest supporter while flaming the fires of those he'd hoodwinked over the years.

Lucius couldn't remember when he'd anticipated a Wizengamot session so much.

-oOoOo-

Petunia Dursley was led into the interview room and seated before the man and woman who were waiting on her, "Mrs Dursley there's no easy way of saying this so I'll just be blunt, your husband suffered from some form of seizure yesterday and died in his cell. We won't know the exact cause of death until after the post mortem."

This was another brick knocked out the foundation of the structure that was Petunia Dursley' sanity; she had to be escorted to the shower by police yesterday to stop the other prisoners attacking her. "Can I see my son?"

This was the question she'd been asking from the moment she'd entered this place and as yet had not received an answer.

The answer that she did get was not what she expected, "I'm sorry Mrs Dursley but your son is having trouble adjusting to the orphanage, we feel bringing him here would only compound those problems."

"Why is my Dudley in an orphanage with all those ruffians? Where is his aunt Marge?"

"Miss Marge Dursley is in a cell about four doors along from yours for her part in the mistreatment of the child, Harry Potter."

If Vernon's death knocked out a brick in her mental stability, the thought of her gentle boy in one of those places brought the entire structure crumbling down, Petunia Dursley snapped.

She thought her sister was laughing at her and made a mad dash straight for the redhead, the officers in question all saw the exact same thing. Petunia Dursley rocketed from her chair screaming about a flower and smacked face first into the wall, she was unconscious and bleeding from a head wound before she hit the floor. Thankfully for the police in the room the entire scene was recorded on video,

'honestly judge she ran into the wall all on her own' sounded weak even to them.

-oOoOo-

When nine o'clock arrived and Albus Dumbledore didn't the old wizard lost the last bit of support he had in the Wizengamot chamber, especially since the clerk confirmed that he'd received his notification.

Only the Chief Warlock could remove the seal on the Potter will so Lucius proposed removing Dumbledore from the post, it was quickly seconded and the motion was passed unopposed. Lucius was about to nominate his candidate but he was beaten to the punch, when Augusta Longbottom was nominated he decided to quit while he was ahead and support the woman who blamed Dumbledore for her son and daughter-in-law's condition. Today was all about sticking it to the so-called leader of the light and Augusta could be as vicious as any attack dog when she had the proper motivation, Lucius could sit back and enjoy the show without revealing his hand.

Augusta was sworn in and her first act was to release the will and have the clerk read it out loud to a packed chamber and public gallery.

This is the last will and testament of James and Lily Potter, if this is being read then know that we have been betrayed and only hope the measures we have taken allowed our son to survive.

Peter Pettigrew was our secret keeper, not Sirius Black as we led people to believe though this document being read would indicate we made a mistake.

This caused absolute mayhem in the chamber and only Augusta's threat to clear the hall and have the will read in private calmed people down. That and her order to the aurors to stun and remove the next person who shouted out.

The clerk continued,

Sirius Black is a fine man who is our son Harry's godfather and well aware of our wishes on how we want our boy raised.

If for any reason Sirius is unavailable we nominate the following in order to look after our son

Alice Longbottom, his godmother

Andromeda Tonks, close family friend

Amelia Bones, close family friend and mentor

Minerva McGonagall, close family friend and mentor

With all of the above I would like to ensure Harry's honorary uncle Remus Lupin is involved in the child's upbringing, Remus our friend, you know you would be top of the list but the law frowns upon your 'furry little problem'

Harry's only living blood relatives have made it clear they want nothing to do with the Potters, we must respect their wishes so our son should only be placed with a person from our list.

A generous stipend has been set aside for his care and he will inherit all our worldly goods, lands and titles at the age of eleven. If we have died that our son may live then know we did this willingly and trust in those named above to provide our son with the love and care he will need.

James Potter

Lily Potter

Witnesses

Sirius Black

Joel Bartholomew

Amelia bones sat as stunned as everyone else while the filing system in her mind searched for Joel Bartholomew, she remembered the case now. He was the Potter lawyer who was found dead in his

apartment and the verdict was serious over indulgence of illegal substances, there were a lot of celebrations going on that night and he must have conveniently slipped through the investigative net.

To think that she could have raised Harry with Susan just increased the anger she felt at this whole situation, she had taken James under her wing for his auror training and really liked the young couple. The magical world had failed their saviours; of that there could be no doubt.

Augusta was starting to piece together a picture that she didn't much care for, her son's family came out from under the fidelius and were tortured into insanity within twenty-four hours of emerging, who told them it was safe and had Alice been making enquiries about her godson were two questions she wanted answered. Just now she had to deal with this mess and the best place to start was at the beginning, "Madam Bones, how is it possible for Sirius Black to be in Azkaban for a crime he clearly didn't commit?"

Amelia knew this wouldn't go down to well but she could only tell the truth, "He didn't receive a trial Chief Witch, Minister Bagnold, Barty Crouch and Albus Dumbledore didn't see the need for one."

The gasps from the hall had the auror's wands twitching but the discipline held, "You mean to tell me the Lestrange's got a trial but Black didn't?" clearly not expecting an answer to this Augusta carried on, "I recommend a trial for Sirius Black take place here at nine tomorrow, I want aurors to arrest Crouch and Dumbledore to insure they attend, a night in the ministry holding cells is hardly seven years in Azkaban but it's a start."

Cornelius Fudge sat thinking his birthday and Christmas had both come early, he was going to be listening more to Lucius from now on. Dumbledore not only sacked but arrested sounded wonderful and he really hated Crouch so the Chief Witch's recommendations quickly received the ministerial stamp of approval. Bagnold could not be charged because thankfully the minister and former ministers of magic were exempt from prosecution for their actions undertaken while minister and Cornelius thought it would be a cold day in hell before that law was changed.

Augusta intended to ensure that Dumbledore explained fully his reasons for having this will sealed and if he mentioned ‘greater good’ even once she would castrate the old bastard with a rusty knife. “Madam Bones could you inform the chamber what measures have been taken to discover the truth behind these stories in the Prophet?”

Amelia decided not to air her suspicions about Skeeter at the moment, she was hoping to get a copy of the reporter’s notes of the interview later today and this would give her a bit of leverage. “A team of aurors attempted to question the uncle but he suffered a severe toxic reaction to truth serum and died within a few minutes, it was decided not to proceed with the planned questioning of the aunt.” She gave them a moment to digest this before continuing, “The goblins refuse to confirm or deny that the boy lives, the quote we received was ‘the magical and mundane worlds may have failed the boy but Gringotts wont’ so you are welcome to read into that anything that you want. We have no records of magical signature or photographs to work with and the drawing that was printed in the Prophet was sketched from descriptions of people who saw the child and is all we have available. The boy could literally walk down Diagon Alley and not be recognised.”

Augusta couldn’t see what else to do until they had more information on the boy, the thought of him growing up with Neville as his brother and Frank and Alice as his parents was like a dagger in her chest at what her family and both boys had lost.

“We shall reconvene here tomorrow at nine for the trial of Sirius Black and the reasons behind these miscarriages of justice, when two of our most prominent citizens can have their rights trampled all over at the whim of a few individuals then this body has to examine the laws allowing this to happen. A child was abandoned specifically where his parent’s wishes precluded him from being placed while the current Lord Black was denied the same rights that were afforded to a few members who are sitting here today. This is unacceptable and steps need to be taken not only to rectify these mistakes but also ensure they can never be repeated. This session is adjourned.”

Amelia sent three teams of aurors on separate missions, the arrest of Dumbledore and Crouch and remove Sirius Black to St Mungo's in the hope they could have him ready to stand trial tomorrow. She herself headed off in search of a reporter though passed a beaming Malfoy and Fudge who seemed ready for a celebratory drink.

-oOoOo-

The team leader of the aurors who arrived at the Crouch residence knew they screwed up with the fat muggle yesterday and were going to do this one by the numbers but when Barty saw the warrant for his arrest his hand went immediately for his wand and a furious but brief fight followed.

He had an injured auror but the bastard was down and would still be fit enough to stand trial tomorrow, he called for back-up as there was obviously something inside old Barty didn't want them to find so they would be going over the full house with a fine toothcomb.

When you pull a wand on four aurors then that is usually an indication of desperation and they were determined to find what he was desperate to remain hidden.

-oOoOo-

Albus aparated to Diagon Alley and headed towards Gringotts, he had a lot on his mind and was used to being stared at so it took him a few moments to realise the hostility that was directed his way. He actually looked behind him to see if there was someone there more deserving of this treatment but no, the entire Alley was focused on him and if looks could kill then Dumbledore received the equivalent of a dozen AK's.

The old wizard caught the young girl's movement from the corner of his eye and turned to face the petite witch who could only have been Molly's youngest, "Hello Ginny, how are you..."

Ginny Weasley was in Diagon Alley to return her Christmas present which, until yesterday had been her most prized possession. Harry Potter and the Enchanted Dragon had filled many lonely hours as she

followed her hero's adventures; the Prophet had proved this was nothing more than a work of fiction and the pictures contained inside fake. This was not how the book had been portrayed or sold so she, like a lot of others planned on demanding a refund. That was before she spied the man responsible for the pain and suffering of her real life hero and Ginny had broken free from her mother's grip before she even noticed what was going on.

The tiny redhead zeroed in on her target like a guided missile, unsure of what she was going to do until the old man spoke to her. Using every ounce of her anger she found a new use for her hard backed former treasure, she threw it at Albus Dumbledore striking him square on the nose and breaking it.

Ginny calmly retrieved her now blood covered book and slowly walked back to her family as the cheering started, this was quickly followed by an assortment of objects being launched in the bleeding Dumbledore's direction forcing the shocked wizard to run for it. He reached the steps of Gringotts only to be welcomed with brandished cold goblin steel in the shape of swords and axes.

Albus was reaching for his wand but was saved by the appearance of four aurors who marched straight up to the old wizard, "Albus Dumbledore, you are under arrest!"

This drew a massive cheer from the crowd and was probably the only reason Albus got out of there in one piece.

Little Ginny Weasley knew she couldn't return her book now as a cleaning charm would also remove the print but this turned out to be a good thing, a Daily Prophet photographer had caught the exact moment she expressed the wizarding world's opinion of Dumbledore and a collector offered the girl a hundred galleons for her bloodstained book. She quickly accepted and her parents placed the money in a trust fund for her, Ginny would be the first Weasley to have new robes and books for attending Hogwarts.

-oOoOo-

Padfoot felt the Dementors leave the wing and changed back to the haggard form of Sirius Black to enjoy the respite however brief, the shock when his door was opened for the first time in nearly seven years left him wondering if this was a dream again.

“Sirius Black, you have to come with us sir as your trial has been scheduled for nine o’clock tomorrow morning.”

Sirius had prayed for those words a thousand times over but now he was hearing them spoken by the auror he was unsure how to proceed, this was the part he usually woke up.

The sun in his face as the boat left the island almost had him in tears but he managed to hold himself together by remembering he was a marauder though if this was a prank he was going to jump over the side, drowning was eminently preferable to returning to Azkaban.

He still hadn’t spoken a word as they portkeyed him into St Mungo’s and placed him in a secure room that had shower / bathroom with clean robes left hanging on the door. Sirius was washed, changed and had eaten the best meal he could remember when the door opened and admitted two female visitors, Andi sprang into his arms crying while the young pink-haired witch held back a moment or two before saying “uncle Siri!” and joining her mother.

Sirius began to believe this was real so asked the question uppermost in his mind; the answer had him hoping this was a nightmare.

“Where’s Harry?”

Andi couldn’t look at her cousin as she answered, “Dumbledore left him with the Dursleys and they may have murdered him.”

Sirius Black broke down and cried like a baby, both ladies had to help him onto the bed where he curled up into a foetal position and sobbed himself to sleep.

A/N Thanks for reading

## Chapter 6

Harry had settled down considerably by the time Xeno found him in the library to gather his ideas on letting people know he was still alive, Dan and Emma watched fascinated as Jonathon explained to Luna and Hermione about the light spell and had both witches perform it. Maia couldn't believe how powerful these children were and explained to the muggle parents that Hermione was slightly more powerful than Luna because of their age difference but both were already displaying more raw magical power than she had.

Martha like grandmothers the world over couldn't help butting in praising her grandson, "You should see Harry, if anything he is even more powerful and picks magic up very easily."

Jonathon couldn't hide his smile, "This from the woman who doesn't want me to push him too hard."

Martha was saved her reply by Cas entering to say the horses had arrived and asking if anyone would like to see them, the brightness in both girls' eyes almost matched the lumos charms they'd been practicing.

"Jonathon and Martha, we would be more than happy to contribute towards the purchase and upkeep of the horses," said Emma with Maia also nodding her agreement.

Jonathon shot her down in flames, "Nonsense Emma, I won't hear of it. When the children stay with you or Maia they will be well looked after without the Potters contributing, as long as they're together, happy and safe then that's the most important thing. The Potters are a very wealthy family but my grandson's happiness means more to me than all the gold in Gringotts. Cas and Ziggy are already fencing off a paddock where they can safely be taught to ride, an adventure playground with swings, slides and a tree house will be appearing shortly. The children will be able to practice their magic here in the morning then play all day being watched by Cas, Ziggy and of course Hedwig leaving you four free to work. I'm quite happy to see Harry staying at either of your houses but would like to suggest we try and

leave at least one day of the weekend when we can all get together here."

Both families thought this was a wonderful idea, their children would be cared for through the day, they would get to spend time with their new family in the evenings and at the weekend get to stay in what would be the equivalent of a muggle five star country hotel.

Dan and Xeno stayed to discuss Harry's story with the Potter grandparents while the rest were led out the house by two young ladies who were chomping at the bit to see the horses. They left from a side door giving Maia and Emma some idea of just how big Potter Manor was, the grounds were also extensive and both could see the children would love riding around here all summer.

Maia had been delighted when Emma had asked if she could accompany the witch when she was brewing Harry's lotion, both mothers were becoming friends and she was glad Emma was being so accepting of the magical world. Maia was also happy that Luna would grow up not only having friends but with the ability and knowledge to pass in both worlds giving all three children limitless options when they were older.

They had quickly formed a schedule based around Jonathon's suggestion and were planning on spending the weekend at the manor then the children could spend their days here and alternate nights at their homes for the rest of the summer. School was something they were going to have to discuss when they got a better idea of how things settled out.

The kids were now far ahead of the adults as they hurried towards the clearly visible stable block, the sound of excited laughter was music to the ears as both Emma and Maia contemplated how different their lonely daughter's lives had become since the inclusion of one Harry Potter.

The girls rushed into the stables and ground to a halt as they struggled to take in the scene before them; with eyes as big as saucers they gazed lovingly at the four ponies and two horses who's heads were looking out over their stalls.

Both girls stood like statues with only their eyes moving and Harry thought it was so funny he just had to say something, "Ok, we've seen the horses, is it time to go back now?"

Anyone else would have received a playful hit but both girls seemed to know instinctively that was the wrong thing to do with Harry, instead they held his arm and kissed his cheek to say 'thank you' for the ponies.

Harry was bright red and being held by both girls as Maia and Emma entered the stable, Hermione was gushing, "Mum have you ever seen a more beautiful sight in your life?"

Hermione was obviously meaning the ponies and was hyper thinking of the equestrian adventures they would have but Emma never took her eyes off the three happy children, "No love, I don't think I have."

-oOoO-

Dumbledore paced in his little cell desperately trying to plot a safe route out of this mess, he could get out of here in an instant by calling Fawkes but had a suspicion that's what they wanted. He would then be an escaped criminal and lose any credibility he had left.

By subtle use of legitimacy he'd picked up that Harry had been murdered at the hands of his uncle who'd basically beaten the boy to death, he personally thought the prophecy wouldn't allow that to happen but the results were nearly as bad. He was sacked from the position of Chief Warlock, the Potter will was now public knowledge, Black was going to get a trial and the bloody goblins were pissed at him for some reason.

He could always play the 'keeping Harry safe' card but citing what happened to the Longbottoms could be a double-edged sword with Augusta now in charge. When Frank and Alice not only didn't believe Sirius was guilty but started making preparations to claim Harry, Albus was forced to act.

He was certain his plan could never be traced back to him, a seemingly casual meeting with Mundungus where he mentioned the Longbottoms were coming out of hiding and where they would be staying was followed by a gift of a few gold coins. Dumbledore could predict Dung's actions in a way that Sybil could only dream of, the wizard headed for the nearest pub of ill repute to spend his gold and boast to anyone who would listen about his conversation with the great Albus Dumbledore.

Albus had to admit even he was surprised at the speed and severity of the response but then not all death eaters were posturing, pompous pricks like Malfoy, some of them could be relied on to do their jobs properly.

The old wizard was aware the situation looked bleak and even he as a master manipulator may need a little help with this one, what he wasn't aware of was that help was currently being locked in cells a couple of doors down from him as the Crouches were made secure for the night.

-oOoOo-

Emma's first look at the Lovegood's dwelling left only one impression on her mind, chess rook!

Maia was laughing at Emma's awkward attempts to say something nice about her home, "It's quite all right, your reaction mirrors mine the first time I laid eyes on the place but with Xeno it was love at first sight. I don't think it was anything to do with phallic symbolism, more that it was different. You may not have noticed but my husband tends to lean quite heavily towards 'different' in most things?"

Emma was trying but failing in her attempts not to laugh, "I thought he was just colour blind."

Maia was laughing as well now with the mention of Xeno's dress sense, "You should have seen the robes he wanted to get married in, they were bight canary yellow and made him look like an omelet."

Emma watched fascinated as Maia started picking things from her well maintained garden for Harry's lotion, "Whenever possible I always use fresh ingredients that I've picked myself, the results you get are just so much better than the dried varieties."

Stepping inside of the 'rook' the contrast couldn't have been any more pronounced, while from the outside the house screamed Xeno inside was all Maia. The atmosphere generated was one of warmth and comfort, leaving you wanting nothing more than to kick off your shoes and curl up in a comfy chair with a mug of hot chocolate. Emma was already certain Hermione would love any time she spent here.

She noticed Maia leave her wand as they headed down into the potion's lab and asked her about it, "Just habit, most of the potions research I do have ingredients or are themselves unstable during brewing, being an accomplished potions brewer is all about controlling everything to the last degree so no magic is ever done in this room. The lotion I'm making for Harry doesn't require these precautions but with some of the stuff I've got in this room I would follow these safety procedures even for brewing a pot of tea."

Emma could relate to that from her own experiences, the Dentistry regulations put in place since AIDS had seriously affected the way they now treated patients, there was a fair chance she may never treat a patient suffering from this virus but you followed safety procedures just in case.

A fascinated Emma looked on as Maia prepared her ingredients and actually set up a cauldron, the Shakespearian in Emma couldn't help but think 'Eye of newt, and toe of frog, Wool of bat, and tongue of dog,' but didn't want to mention this in case it turned out to be the secret recipe for 'Pepsi' or something. The way things had been going lately she wasn't ruling out anything.

"Maia, could you try and explain why Harry is so famous in your world? I've heard this boy-who-lived story but don't really understand it."

"For that you need to comprehend the background and build-up to what was happening before the adulation makes any sense, it would be naive to think that all magical users would use their abilities to do good but there was an extremely powerful wizard who went as bad as it's possible to go. He was so evil that even today people are afraid to say his name, he gathered followers to him and their cruelty knew no bounds as they controlled, tortured, raped and murdered anyone they wished. Our society was teetering on the brink of anarchy; the husband who you kissed off to work that morning could come home the same day and murder his entire family due to following instructions applied after being unforgivably cursed. It was the darkest of times and most people would agree only a matter of months before the government collapsed, then the miracle happened. He attacked the Potter house, murdered Harry's father and mother but when he turned his wand on the baby his curse was reflected back and killed him. There have been many books written about that night but the only one who was there is Harry so I tend to dismiss them as people out to make money off Harry's name."

Emma was trying to imagine the world Maia described but nothing in her life gave her a frame of reference, yes she'd seen things on the news that were terrible and sometimes Hollywood could stir your emotions but this was real life.

Maia was visibly still deeply entrenched in the past though her movements and actions were clear and precise as she continued working while reminiscing, "One of my biggest worries used to be what would happen to Luna if I was killed, Xeno is a wonderful man and a loving father but I hate to think how our daughter would have turned out if I wasn't around. Thanks to her bond and seeing the way you looked at the children this morning I know if anything happened to me my little Luna would be well cared for. Sorry for being so morbid but thinking back brought all those old feelings to the fore; almost everyone who didn't actively support him had the same thoughts over the survival of their family."

Emma wanted to hug Maia in support but was afraid to disturb her concentration as she muttered instructions to herself, the dentist found it hard to believe that the number, speed and direction of stirs could make a difference to the finished product. "Maia since both

over-protective father's are elsewhere could you tell me what you think will happen with this bond that they share.”

Maia finished stirring, adjusted the flame under the cauldron and set the timer for seven minutes, her actions giving her time to formulate an answer, “I think it will grow to a full soul bond, at least between Harry and the girls while our daughter’s relationship with each other when they’re older is something I will never ask them about. They can already talk to Hedwig in their heads and I would imagine at some point this would spill over into being able to communicate with each other by the same method. Bonds are very rare, don’t usually form with children so young and it’s predominantly between couples but when you’re Harry Potter and have a white phoenix as a familiar then anything is possible. One thing you might want to start preparing Dan for is that when a soul bond forms it’s considered a marriage in the wizarding world and the girls will both become Potters.”

It was a flabbergasted Emma who reflected you should never ask a question that you don’t want to know the answer to, “They’re far too young!”

Maia’s eye’s widened when she realized where Emma’s thoughts had gone, “Oh my goodness no, they can be soul bound without doing that! They’ll progress normally and reach that stage the same time as their peers but with the advantage of knowing they’re married and their partner truly loves them.”

Emma’s head was spinning and she wasn’t sure whether it was the unaccustomed fumes in the room or the thought of Dan’s head exploding when he discovered what the future held for the apple of his eye.

The timer sounded and Maia turned off the flame before taking Emma’s arm, leading her up the stairs for a much-needed cup of tea. The muggle mother had been dealing with the situation she found her family in really well but this had proved a revelation too far.

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Emma was at dinner that night in body only as her mind wrestled with Maia's predictions for their daughter's future, she felt every instinct in her body imploring her to protect Hermione. The only problem was when she looked at her little girl it was easy to see Hermione had never been safer or happier, she'd spent the afternoon learning to ride with her two friends and being watched over by two elves and a phoenix.

After dinner she and Maia followed the children up the stairs where Cas had again run the bath in Harry's room, all three kids quickly but unashamedly threw off their clothes before jumping in. She only half-heard Cas explaining that the salts in the water would help any aches or pains from their pony riding today, Emma was captivated by the sight of them washing each other's hair.

She had a warm towel waiting for Hermione when she climbed out and the pyjamas that Cas provided then Hermione joined Luna holding Harry's hand as Maia applied her lotion.

"Harry this may feel cold for a minute but that's normal," he just smiled at Maia in thanks.

Cas handed Emma Harry's pyjamas and when Maia proclaimed him finished for the night she helped him put them on. "That's a lovely design on the pocket Harry, what is it?"

The young boy ran his hand lovingly over the raised design, "I don't know Mrs Granger, these belonged to my dad and Cas did magic on them so they would fit me."

The look of longing on Harry's face broke Emma Granger's resistance and she drew him into a hug, "Oh Harry, I know we'll never replace your parents but please understand you're not alone anymore, we all want to take care of you. The three of you will be staying at our house tomorrow night, spending the day here then with Maia and Xeno the next night, does that sound ok?"

Harry's smile could have outshone the Blackpool illuminations and both girls appeared to have some energy left as they bounced up and down with excitement at the prospect of showing their friends where

they lived. The Potters and Lovegoods had convinced the Grangers that the kids needed to spend as much time together as possible until the bond stabilised so all three were soon tucked up in Harry's massive bed and received goodnight kisses from both Maia and Emma before snuggling in to each other and surrendering to their tiredness.

Emma had decided her instincts were going to be posted to John O'Groats because what she witnessed tonight was something so beautiful and pure it brought a tear to her eye, she knew there would be trials and tribulations ahead but would face them when the time came instead of worrying about what might happen. In all the decisions they had to make the yardstick would always be the same, what was best for Hermione though she felt sure Harry and Luna would have to be factored in from now on.

-oOoO-

Chief Inspector Duncan Roberts frowned as he saw the envelope addressed to him sitting squarely on his desk; there was no stamp or anything other than his name written across the centre. How on earth it got in here was a mystery and he didn't need any more of those since he had more than enough with the Potter case, he opened the envelope and then dropped the letter onto his desk.

He was on the phone seconds later, "Get me a forensics' team up here now."

Duncan was an experienced policeman and his gut was telling him this was genuine, he would bet his pension that the handwriting and small blood sample matched those they already had on file from his school and cupboard.

In the letter Harry stated he was safe and well but wasn't coming back in case he ended up with another family like the Dursleys, the Chief Inspector couldn't blame the boy in the slightest. He didn't want them looking for him which was why he was providing proof he was still alive and was happy where he was, Duncan knew that if this was verified it would move the case from a murder investigation to a missing person.

With that person claiming they were safe and the uncle now dead, police resources would soon be pulled away for other uses and the case would slowly fade from the public consciousness. Harry Potter would be old news by the end of the summer as something from one of these mindless reality shows caught everyone's attention, how was it possible to spend hours watching strangers sleeping inside a house?

-oOoOo-

Ragnok stared in awe at the envelope on his desk, unlike Duncan Roberts the goblin leader was well aware of how it got there. He'd just witnessed a white phoenix deliver it, also unlike the other recipient he wouldn't need the contents verified as there was no greater symbol of trust and honesty than the creature that brought this to him.

Opening the letter he quickly agreed with the request made therein and shouted for his aids, they had a statement to make.

There was no way he would be mentioning the white phoenix in that statement as this was almost a religious experience for Ragnok, he was only the second goblin leader in recorded history to see this phenomenon and that wondrous creature's companion would have his unwavering support.

-oOoOo-

Andi was shown into Sirius's room in tears, she couldn't even speak to her cousin but managed to shove the latest edition of the Quibbler into his hand, the headline ignited a spark of hope in Sirius that had been missing for many years.

Harry Potter Lives!

This newspaper received an interview with the famous son of James and Lily Potter at a secret and secure location, the reasons for which will become apparent later, again we reiterate Harry Potter is alive and well.

For the first time ever read HIS story in HIS own words.

"I was rescued from my cupboard and healed on my birthday by a very special friend, I now live a normal life with my two best friends by my side and have no wish to change that. I have written to the bank and asked them to confirm this as I have been advised they would have that ability as my inheritance would let them know I wasn't dead."

When asked why he wished to remain hidden this was the boy's reply.

"I already had one bad experience of a family mistreating me and have no wish to give someone else another chance to do the same, I understand a lot of people make loads of money off my name without my permission so I imagine there would be a lot of families wanting to get a hold of me. I am now well looked after and very happy so will remain hidden until it's time to go to school."

He then said he had something he would like to say to the witches and wizards of Britain.

"My uncle has paid for his crimes but my advisors have told me that this could cause problems amongst the magical people of the country, my greatest wish is to avoid anyone else suffering like I have. I am told my two best friends are a muggle born and a pureblood, these names have no meaning for me as I only found out I was a wizard on my recent ninth birthday. What I will say though is that I could never stay in a country that treated them differently because of this, to me they are both my best friends and if I have to chose between their happiness and staying in a country where I was almost beaten to death then you will never see me again."

Young master Potter may still be learning about his family's history and traditions but the Potter trait for fairness seems to have been ingrained at birth, at nine-years-old he has no concept of politics but can relate to his friends. With his tormentor being a muggle there may be a knee-jerk reaction to pass laws further curtailing the rights of those not of pureblood decent, I was left in no doubt what Harry's reaction to anything that discriminates between his friends would be.

We have just discovered our saviour is alive and well, are we really that desperate to pass unjust laws that will drive Harry, along with many others from our country?

Sirius now wore a smile at the thought of his godson not only being alive but also pulling a stunt worthy of a marauder, his advisors had very cleverly turned the public outpouring of grief around and applied conditions to his returning. Any government trying to act against his wishes would soon find itself kicked out on its arse, there would be quite a few purebloods who would not be celebrating Harry still being alive.

Andi had found her voice, "The goblins announced this morning that the story concerning Harry Potter in the Quibbler was true and that they had also been contacted by him. It was all over the WWN and there were fights breaking out with people desperate to get hold of a copy, there was a massive crowd gathering outside their offices as I left to come over here."

The aurors entered to take Sirius off for his trial and he walked out of that room with his head held high, today he was going to be free and then there was not a force on this planet strong enough to stop him from being a part of his godson's life.

-oOoOo-

Hermione was buzzing with excitement at breakfast, this was better than Christmas. This morning she was going to be practicing magic, this afternoon riding lessons and being taught how to care for the ponies then tonight was a sleepover at her house, she'd never had anyone visit before far less stay the night.

She'd spoken to her mother this morning before eating breakfast, worried in case her bed wasn't big enough but Cas had assured her she would come over and cast a charm to solve the problem, Hermione just loved magic.

Dan was looking forward to having the kids stay at their house tonight, it was going to take a while for them to get used to all this magic but

the sparkle in his daughter's eyes this morning meant it was all worth while.

Xeno and Maia were coming over for supper and to find out exactly where their house was, Xeno said it was easier just to appear there if they knew exactly where it was so Hedwig, Cas and Ziggy were taking them all there after the kids had finished their riding.

Dan was hoping he could get a better handle on the dynamics of the children's relationship when they were in an environment that he was more familiar with, he was delight Hermione had friends but he was honest enough to admit he wasn't sure how he was going to handle the situation when the kids were older. His plan was to get to know Harry and Luna a lot better and introduce them to the cinema, ten-pin bowling, restaurants and perhaps even football when the season started, he had no intention of losing his little girl to the wonders of the magical world.

-oOoO-

Sirius was led into the packed Wizengamot chamber where the atmosphere was electric, you could almost see the charge radiating off Madam Longbottom. The Chief Witch was seriously pissed and for a very good reason, they'd managed to keep the Barty Crouch Jr. affair under wraps with only her and Amelia aware of what was going to happen here today. Proving Sirius Black was innocent was only the appetiser before she served up a few heads onto plates.

The prisoner was administered the truth serum before the questioning began.

“What is your name?”

“Sirius Orion Black”

“Were you the Potter secret keeper?”

“No, we switched at the last minute to try and fool Voldemort, Peter Pettigrew was the secret keeper.”

“Did you murder those muggles?”

“No, Peter cut off his finger before blowing up the street. He’s an unregistered animagus whose form is a rat and he disappeared into the sewer system as the aurors arrived and arrested me.”

Madam Longbottom had warned everyone that the same rules of behaviour applied today and since nobody wanted to miss this only a few gasps were expelled at this revelation.

“Why did you not inform the aurors of this?”

“I was overcome with grief and they quickly stunned me, I woke up in Azkaban and this is the first conversation I’ve had since waking up in my cell.”

This engaged Augusta even more knowing what was following this trial, “Didn’t you receive any visitors?”

“I was informed that maximum security prisoners were not allowed visitors, my cousin Andi told me that she repeatedly applied for visitation rights but was refused every time.”

Augusta nodded for the auror to administer the antidote before addressing the chamber, “Is there anyone here who doubts the innocence of this wizard?” she was met with total silence, “Is there anyone here who doesn’t think this wizard should be compensated for our failure and his time spent in Azkaban because of this?”

Fudge looked ready to say something at this point but the eyes of Augusta Longbottom seemed to pin him like a bug to a board, he wisely decided this was not a good time to say anything about money.

She turned her attention back to Sirius, “Sirius Orion Black this chamber finds you innocent of any wrongdoing and furthermore awards you one hundred thousand galleons for every year you spent unjustly locked in Azkaban. I know this gold cannot pay you back for the lost years and only hope you can find it in your heart to forgive us someday.”

Sirius stood before answering, "Madam Longbottom I can only reiterate the sentiments my godson expressed in today's Quibbler, our society needs laws in place so that no innocent person should ever have to suffer what both he and I have suffered. The laws should be the same for everyone regardless of birth status, wealth or position. I will say this though, if this court discovers who is responsible for the illegal and perilous position my godson was placed in, let it be known that I will be going after them with everything that I am."

"I would like to give you my assurance that if we can prove any wrongdoing the guilty party will suffer, regardless of who they are." Sirius nodded to the Chief Witch for her answer and walked from the chamber a free man into the waiting arms of Andi and Nymphadora.

Sirius had only one thing on his mind and two leads to accomplish his goal, both the Quibbler and Gringotts had been in contact with Harry so that's where he was heading deciding the bank should be his first stop since he couldn't even purchase a copy of the Quibbler at the moment.

Back in the chamber Augusta was gripping the rail in front of her so hard it left her knuckles white but confronting one of the torturers of Frank and Alice was no thrill, she'd been arranging care for them and Neville so had missed the original trial but there would be no missing today as she fought to regain some measure of composure.

"Sirius Black's comments become even more poignant and relevant as we try to unravel the web of deceit and lies surrounding these events, to aid us in uncovering the truth we now have another trial in this extraordinary session of the Wizengamot. Aurors could you please bring in the prisoners, Bartemius Crouch Sr. and Bartemius Crouch Jr."

There was an eerie silence as members considered whether the Longbottom matriarch had found the position of Chief Witch too much and had snapped, those thoughts were soon forgotten as the shackled prisoners were led into the chamber accompanied by total mayhem and stunners flying everywhere.

A/N Thanks for reading

## Chapter 7

Lucius Malfoy was rennervated and immediately jumped to his feet wanting someone to suffer for the assault on his person; the blond ponce was red-faced at the indignity of being stunned and giving free reign to his anger, “What’s the meaning of this? How dare aurors stun members of the Wizengamot, I demand action!”

His anger though was but a candle compared to the blast furnace that was Augusta Longbottom, her glare alone was enough to force Malfoy to retake his seat but when she spoke her voice not only commanded respect but, to add insult to injury, was a good few octaves lower than his whine as well. “Everyone in this chamber was given notice about the type of behaviour that would not be tolerated; you chose to disobey this and suffered the consequences. We’ve already had one man spend almost eight years in the high security wing of Azkaban for a crime he didn’t commit, now from that same wing we have an escaped man thought to be dead and who most certainly did commit the crimes that sent him there. I’m beginning to wonder if we can trust any of the trials from that period, and if you demand action Mr Malfoy you might just see yourself in that chair next. We have plenty truth serum and I’m sure you’d like the opportunity to remove any ambiguity over the verdict that you were under the Imperius Curse when you committed all those crimes that you were pardoned for.”

There was total silence in the chamber as some of the members thought they had created a monster, instead of doing deals and gathering favours this stupid bitch was actually trying to do the job of Chief Witch.

Lucius went from shouting to shuddering in the space of seconds, he was under no illusions that Longbottom wouldn’t carry out her threat and he’d be kissing a dementor before the day was out. There was no way his defence could stand up to questioning under Veritaserum and his exhilaration of yesterday seemed a lifetime ago. Potter was alive and threatening not to return if discriminatory laws were passed; black was free and for some reason Barty Crouch Jr. was chained to a chair in the middle of the Wizengamot. If they fed the truth serum to Barty Jr. then there could be a few in the Wizengamot joining them

chained to chairs in this chamber. Compared to that Dumbledore spending a night in a ministry cell didn't seem like a fair exchange.

Cornelius actually mustered some courage and acted like a minister, "Augusta, I would appreciate knowing just what the hell is going on here!"

"Cornelius for once I agree with you, the aurors who went to arrest Barty Sr. found themselves under attack, after subduing him the aurors decided to search his house in an attempt to discover what he was hiding. His son was lying on a bed under an invisibility cloak and suffering from repeated exposure to the Imperius Curse, which we think was applied by his father. Like you I'm determined to find out what's going on here."

Again the silence weighed heavily over the chamber so Augusta continued, "One thing I find strange is that our healers tell us Barty Jr. is unable to answer questions because repeated use of the curse and his continual fighting against it has basically scrambled his brain. Stranger still is the fact that of all the people who gained their freedom by claiming to be under this curse I don't see any of them with drool running down their chin." Her gaze was locked onto Malfoy and the message couldn't have been any clearer, she thought he was a lying bastard!

Barty Sr. was fed the serum and, after establishing both their identities the real questioning began.

"How did your son escape from the high security wing at Azkaban?"

"He walked out the front door along with me, polyjuiced as his mother. She was dying and wanted her son out of there so traded places with him. It was my polyjuiced wife who died and is buried there."

Amelia couldn't contain her anger, "That's precisely why visits to that wing are prohibited, how did you get in there?"

“The minister was aware my wife was dying and granted her last wish to see her son on compassionate grounds.”

No one needed the fact that an innocent Sirius Black was denied visitors while Barty Sr. used his influence to affect the escape of his son pointed out to them.

Augusta gathered herself and resumed her questioning, “Who applied the unforgivable Imperius Curse on your son?”

Barty Sr. sealed his fate with his next answer, “I did.”

“Why was this curse used?”

“I promised my wife I would let him live but without the Imperius Curse he would have been off looking for his master, Voldemort.”

“Why was Sirius Black denied a trial?”

“I wanted to use his capture and imprisonment as a springboard for my push to be minister, discovering my son was a death eater put paid to those ambitions.”

Augusta was calling on all her experience to remain professional when she wanted nothing more than to draw her wand and murder these two bastards where they sat, “What was Dumbledore’s involvement in all this?”

“He wanted the Potter will blocked, I wanted Black in Azkaban. We supported each other and the minister did what we advised. No one knew my son had escaped and was still alive.”

“Did you know Sirius Black was innocent?”

“No but it didn’t matter, I just needed the headline.”

Augusta again indicated the auror could administer the antidote and addressed the Wizengamot, “This chamber already passed sentence on the son and his escape from Azkaban carries a fixed punishment.

I would like to propose that the father receive the same fate for planning and executing the escape and repeated use of an unforgivable curse."

Malfoy wasn't the first to agree but he was a close second, a potential disaster had been avoided and while he wasn't too pleased about the public slapping that Augusta had verbally administered in his direction it was way better than the fate awaiting the Crouches.

The vote was unanimous and a pair of dementors assured that neither father nor son would be escaping again. A short recesses was called to allow people to get there breath back before Dumbledore was called to answer for his part in these proceedings.

-oOoO-

Emma was having trouble believing Harry Potter was only nine, he'd calmly informed his grandfather that he would give the girls a chance to catch up with his lessons before continuing when the were all at the same level. She was thirty-two and didn't think she'd be able to turn down the chance to learn real magic for anything; of course this only increased both girl's devotion to him, as well as focusing their minds on learning as quickly as possible so Harry could participate again.

Hermione wasn't used to being behind in anything, and Luna too seemed to acquire a concentration that belied her years as they strived to make the feathers float. Emma was struck by something so blindingly obvious she'd totally overlooked it, all three kids had been 'observers' of life rather than 'participants' but now that they had found one another that seemed to be changing with a vengeance as they filled their days with fun and laughter. Even this morning's lesson promoted giggles as Hermione's and Luna's feathers not only took to the air, but began chasing one another around the room. Only the look of awe on Maia's face alerted the Grangers that this was not normal behaviour, even for magical children.

Maia was astonished at the girl's achievements, Luna was only nine weeks younger than Harry but because of the cut-off date for Hogwarts it would be another three years before she went to school.

Wingardium Leviosa was a first year charm but the giggling girls seemed to have mastered it effortlessly, she would talk to Emma and Martha about introducing the kids to potions before they went to Hogwarts, she even suspected Emma would want to sit-in on the lessons.

She wished Xeno had been here to see this but he was up very early and off to the office before the rest of the manor was even out of bed, his excitement for the biggest story of his career didn't allow him much sleep and he confidently predicted this would be the best selling issue ever of the Quibbler.

Dan couldn't help but laugh as Hermione's feather was chased around his head by Luna's, he had some experience with remote controlled cars but this was amazing and all controlled by the kid's magic. He was certain that brooms were mentioned at dinner last night and Dan had thought they were joking with the muggles but now he wasn't so sure. Watching those feathers fly around Dan found himself hoping that brooms were real and that he could have a ride on one.

-oOoOo-

Sirius found himself having to deal with family business first before he could progress to the real reason for visiting Gringotts, being declared Lord Black gave him the opportunity to welcome back a tearful Andi into the Black family while casting out Bella. Cissi would get the benefit of the doubt until he could speak with her, his experience of being innocent in Azkaban could foster no other decision.

Business concluded he was surprised to find his request for a meeting with the goblin in charge of the Potter accounts was approved, what was shocking though was when they were led into the office of the goblin leader.

"I am pleased to see wizarding justice finally being done Lord Black, welcome back to Gringotts and how may we help you?" Ragnok asked.

Sirius was aware that time was money to the goblins so didn't waste any on meaningless preliminaries, "Director Ragnok as you are probably aware Harry Potter is my godson, I would like to regain contact with the child I haven't seen for nearly eight years. If he's found an environment where he's safe and happy I would have no wish to remove him from that, only ensure I can hopefully become part of his life again."

The sincerity of the wizard's words were apparent to all present so Ragnok reached a decision, he believed it would be in the best interest of both the bank's Potter and Black customers to provide what information he had.

"Lord Black we have our own means of ascertaining that the heir to the Potter vaults is alive. We received a hand-written note, with a spot of blood for identification purposes, asking us to confirm that the story in today's Quibbler was genuine. There is not one shred of doubt that the note came from your godson Harry James Potter but there is one thing more. I will not betray a trust but please believe me when I say that the delivery method left no room for error that your godson is safe, well and protected from any evil."

They left the bank none the wiser to Harry's location but at least assured he was being looked after, Ragnok's delivery comment had set them thinking but Sirius trusted the goblins far more than the ministry.

Sirius and the Tonks women headed towards their second lead and found the offices of the Quibbler surrounded by people looking for more information.

-oOoO-

Albus wished for a mirror to check his appearance but would have to settle for what he had, thanks to Fawkes that was quite a lot. Armed with the required information, his best robes and having a phoenix tear land on his tongue to counteract truth serum he was as ready as he was going to get. He paid no notice to the mournful song his familiar was singing as Fawkes provided the required tear, Albus just ordered the bird to take away the robes he'd just discarded. When the

guards opened the door and found him waiting in all his splendour he would let them wonder how it was achieved, he was after all Albus Dumbledore and parting with knowledge was not in his nature.

He strolled serenely into the Wizengamot chamber and sat on the seat provided, Albus was grateful when the chains didn't wrap around his arms and legs. It would have limited his ability to perform and seriously wrinkled his robes. This was his battleground, and while he preferred to have already arranged for the votes to be cast in his favour beforehand, it wouldn't do any harm to remind everyone who was the greatest wizard in the land.

"Albus Dumbledore you are here today in the hope that we can shed light on some past events, would you consent to the administration of truth serum?" Augusta didn't think there was a hope in hell he was going to say yes but his answer shocked the old witch and had her immediately off balance.

"If this chamber wishes for me to take this serum I will of course give my consent, I would like to add this proviso, the serum does not offer the person under its influence the leeway to provide explanations for their actions. The answers I would give would indeed be truthful but the only way to discover the whole truth would be to ask all the right questions. If this chamber would permit me to offer the benefit of my considerable experience, may I suggest asking your questions without the serum and if you are dissatisfied with my answers then, by all means administer the drug." Albus watched as Augusta was visibly shaken by his answer and compliance, 'take that you bitch and welcome to the grown-ups game, play time is over' he thought without one twitch to betray his thoughts.

Augusta had no grounds to refuse his suggestion, he wasn't exactly on trial here as they had filed no charges. All they had was Albus asking for the Potter will to remain sealed then placing the child with his aunt, she was hopping the questioning was going to throw up deliberate child endangerment since administering large fines against him was not going to help her here. She decided to dive right in to the heart of the matter and she if she could shake his tightly controlled demeanour, "Very well, your suggestion is acceptable so we shall

begin. Can you tell the chamber why you thought it was necessary to seal the Potter will and place the child with those muggles?"

Albus had known for certain this would be asked and decided the truth would serve best, just not all of it. "I feel we must look back to consider the decision I was faced with at the time, the Potter property was defended by one of the most powerful charms known to the magical world, James Potter was one of our toughest fighters and his wife Lily was no slouch with a wand either yet even that potent combination wasn't sufficient to truly protect the child. I was hesitant to place Harry in a magical home as his whereabouts would soon have been public knowledge, putting that entire families lives at risk."

His eyes were now fixed on the Longbottom bitch who took his job, "We are all aware that Voldemort still possessed loyal followers and, as has been so clearly proven recently by Harry himself, it can be dangerous to assume that someone is dead without there being a body present."

He paused and glanced round the chamber to ascertain the effectiveness of his masterful performance, he'd seen them all wince, except for that bitch Augusta, at the mention of Voldemort's name and he'd just planted the seed that the dark lord may return. They wouldn't send him to Azkaban if they thought that Voldemort may not be gone, he could easily escape but this was about his reputation. Time for him to continue with his performance, and watching to discover the exact moment when a tear running down his cheek would have the most effect.

"I am aware of the spell Lily Potter placed on her son to protect him and it took the willingly sacrificing of her life to activate the magic, this is what saved the child and banished Voldemort. For that protection to continue, and even strengthen, the child needed to stay with a blood relative of his mother, Lily had only one, her sister Petunia. This allowed me to place wards around the home that not even Voldemort, never mind his followers could penetrate. Thus I provided the child with the best protection possible from dark wizards."

This was not going the way Augusta had envisioned; he seemed to be a couple of steps ahead of her at every turn. She had to find a

chink in his armour otherwise he was going to walk out of here Scott free.

"I assume by that last remark you are now aware of how Harry was treated at that safe home, could you please explain why you never went back to check on the boy's welfare?"

Albus could sense this was his moment, the entire chamber watched as the great wizard appeared to deflate and a single tear escaped from his eye, "Lily Potter was one of the kindest witches and wonderful mothers it has ever been my privilege to meet, it seemed inconceivable her sister could be anything less."

If they gave Oscar's in the wizarding world then the grand manipulator would surely have earned multiple nominations for his performance, including best costume drama. Every gesture, nuance and variation in his tone of voice was calculated to show a very caring old man who'd gladly lay down his life before allowing harm to befall a child. It was time to really up the ante, "I actually had someone living in the same street to keep watch on the child, she has even provided a baby-sitting service for him on a few occasions but, as we have now discovered, Vernon Dursley covered evidence of his abuse well. When my dear friend unearthed what had happened she collapsed in the street and is currently receiving care in a muggle hospital, her heart almost gave out thinking young Harry had been taken from us. It is my intention to visit her after our business today and explain that Dursley fooled a great many people as well as her."

Albus did indeed plan to visit Arabella at his earliest convenience but with the intention of performing a few subtle memory charms so their version of events matched.

Augusta's mind was reeling at the reasonable and believable explanations he was laying before the chamber so tried a different track, "Can you tell us what part you played in the incarceration of Sirius Black?"

Dumbledore appeared to think for a moment before answering, "Practically none, Barty approached me about there being no need for a trial as it was now time for the wizarding world to begin the

healing process; I wished support for my placing of Harry Potter in what I considered the safest environment possible. Everyone can now see we were both wrong but at the time who among us doubted Black's guilt? Yes I gave my approval to something I didn't believe in to gain support for a motion I thought would provide the highest level of protection to an orphaned child, I mistakenly thought his family would treat him like a nephew and for that I offer my heartfelt apology."

His performance was magnificent, very few in the chamber were immune to the image portrayed of a grandfather who would be having nightmares about that decision for the rest of his life. "If everyone who made a deal to get something they really believed in passed by this chamber, then found themselves in the position I'm in now, I'm sure we would need a lot more chairs beside me and there would be scant few left amongst us to preside over the hearings."

Augusta had nothing, he'd missed an official summons but for that had lost his position on the Wizengamot and spent the night in a cell, further punishment for that offence was out of the question. Dumbledore wanted the will sealed but the Wizengamot had approved the motion and, with the absence of the Potter will, his actions regarding the placement of baby Harry with his aunt appeared logical. She surmised this wasn't the whole truth but to push for use of the serum would be putting her position on the line, should they not discover anything incriminating she would be forced to resign. Two things staid her hand, as Chief Witch she had the power to push the Wizengamot in the direction of the light and if the old coot could get new robes into a monitored, locked cell then perhaps he could also get an antidote for truth serum.

Albus was trying not to smirk, they would have no option but to release him and at the first sign of trouble, real or manufactured by him, they would come crawling back begging for his leadership once more. He would just have to appear contrite as they released him then ascertain what had the goblin's knickers in a twist.

Augusta had just experienced her knickers being pulled down and given a public spanking by a true aficionado of the great game, her options were now limited to administering the only judgement

available to her. She may have just been outmatched but couldn't resist having a few 'digs' at the great wizard.

"Albus Dumbledore we would like to thank you for your time here today, you are free to leave when this session ends. I hope the lessons learned here in the past few days will herald the dawn of a more open form of government, where the business of the magical world is conducted in this chamber an not its corridors. As you appear to be experiencing difficulties with your owl post I will inform you that the ICW has called a meeting for tomorrow night, the Hogwarts board of governors meets on Tuesday night and the goblins have declared you persona non grata, impounding your accounts to be passed to the Potter heir when he becomes of age. I now declare this extraordinary session of the Wizengamot over."

Beneath his calm exterior Dumbledore was seething, as his eyes scanned the crowd they locked on Malfoy. Lucius was going to be his main opposition for the Hogwarts board meeting, threats, blackmail and even imperio would be used by Albus to ensure he retained the headmasters post. He needed to get the Potter brat to regain his gold; he had not connived all these years to steal that money only for some autocratic beasts carrying swords to take it from him.

Lucius was also raging, he thought Dumbledore was going down for sure but that old wizard could give eels lessons on being slippery. Instead of an attack dog Augusta was left looking more like a Dachshund than a Doberman, but he was under no illusions anyone else would have done any better. His father had told him that politics was the greatest game in the world but as he sat there trying to get a hold of his temper he had an epiphany, all these proceedings centred around one name.

Controlling Harry Potter bought you control of the game and, with it the magical world. Lucius could just see the boy growing up alongside Draco and both ruling over Britain, while he pulled the strings from the background of course. He would make it a priority to find the missing boy, Lucius had methods available to him that the ministry did not or could not use. This would also prove life-savingly opportunistic should, as Dumbledore hinted, his former master make a reappearance. Being able to deliver a gift wrapped Harry Potter to

the Dark Lord would ensure not only that his heart continued to beat but should cement his position at his master's right hand.

-oOoOo-

Dan Granger had both arms around his wife's waist and considered himself a rich man, he had this wonderful woman who daily professed her love for him, a daughter whose smile could melt his heart, a thriving business that both he and Emma loved with money in the bank for a rainy day. Yes he was surely a rich man but as they watched the children being taught to ride he couldn't help but think that his daughter's new life was going to surpass that by quite a margin.

It wasn't the fact that being outside gave him some idea of just how grand Potter manor was, or the fact that the day after the girls mentioned their love of horses, ponies had appeared; complete with all the required paraphernalia and now a paddock as well. Even down to the riding britches, boots and safety helmets with, of course, a groom come instructor thrown in for good measure. Nothing was left to chance.

Like most fathers Dan thought his little girl was a princess but Hermione now had the opportunity to actually live that dream, and had even found her prince charming. No princess was ever taken better care off, apart from Luna that is, as Dan couldn't help but notice that, even with Ziggy in the paddock along with the children, Cas and Hedwig were ever alert for the first sign of any danger or mishap.

It was the look of concentration on Hermione's face that finally crumbled Dan's last ounce of resistance; he and Emma were well used to it as their studious daughter tried to solve some puzzle from a book but this was different. Where before her brows would knit and her chin would square with determination, here she was clearly listening and obeying every word that Ziggy uttered but the smile on her face was matched only by those of Harry and Luna. Dan figured he would just have to accept his new family consisted of three children, not forgetting another set of parents, a couple of elves, a portrait and a phoenix. He found that even the phoenix part didn't

bother him though he was looking forward to spending the night in his own home.

He squeezed Emma's waist, "We really should be getting home to arrange things for tonight and get some food for supper and breakfast, we've been spoilt by Cas."

Emma leaned back into her husband, "I know, a woman could get used to being spoilt like this. At least we get to come back here next weekend, we could even spend our holidays here?"

Cas had been standing next to the couple and Maia, "Excuse me Miss Emma but the Potters own properties all over the world, Miss Lily's favourite was a beach house in Florida with its own private ocean front."

Emma's eyes were nearly the same size as Cas's with the thought of sunshine, sea and a private beach, "Oh I'd love to see that!"

Seconds later Cas had taken the three parents to the deck of the beach house and both women emitted excited squeals as Dan quietly reconfigured his estimate from princess to queen.

"We could come here next weekend if you wish; I can bring the frame from the dining room which will allow Lord and Lady Potter to join us"

Dan suddenly had his arms full with two beautiful, excited women who both seemed determined to squeeze him to death, while kissing his cheek and proclaiming loudly that the kids would love it here. Dan wasn't sure if it was lack of oxygen due to the hugs but he suddenly had this vision of Emma introducing Maia to bikini wearing and had to agree with his earlier assessment, he was indeed a rich man.

-oOoOo-

Sirius, Andi and Nymphadora finally made it into the Quibbler editor's office only to find that Amelia Bones had already beat them to it.

Xeno was ecstatic, he knew this story was going to be big but it had nearly started riots in the streets. His presses were struggling to keep pace with demand and people had started fighting for the few unsold copies that were still available, subscriptions were through the roof.

“Please everyone take a seat, my congratulations sir on your release. Can I assume you are all here for the same issue?” Xeno asked.

This was his only lead so Sirius was on his best behaviour, “Sir I am looking for news of my godson, the only thing that kept me sane in Azkaban was knowing he was all right. I assumed he was with his godmother or in Andi’s care, had I been aware he was at the Dursleys then you have my word no prison would have kept me from him.”

Xeno wondered how much he could tell these people, Harry’s location was protected and even under torture he would be unable to reveal it. “All of you were named by the Potters as people they trusted to care for their son, I’ve already had Minerva McGonagall on the floor threatening to transfigure certain parts of my anatomy if Harry doesn’t show up for Hogwarts fit and healthy. We are all well aware that the esteemed professor does not make idle threats.” Even Nymphadora, who’d only known the professor for her three years of Hogwarts didn’t doubt for one second she would carry out her threat.

“Harry had been severely and systematically beaten for most of his young life, the physical scars are being healed and the environment he now finds himself in is doing wonders for the mental scars.” The fire in Xeno’s eyes was unmistakable, “If I had got my wand on his uncle then Amelia, you and I would be having a totally different discussion.”

There was something at the edge of Sirius’s perception that was bothering him, he needed to discover if his suspicions were correct. “Madam Bones, could you forget you’re the head of the DMLE for a few minutes? I promise I mean no harm to anyone in this room.”

Amelia was aware her department owed this wizard big time and, although she had her hand on her wand, she nodded her permission, watching in disbelief as Padfoot made an appearance.

The big black dog padded over to Xeno and carefully sniffed the editor before transforming back, “I know that scent almost better than my own, James used to sit the little tyke on my back and he would giggle like mad as we paraded around the room. Please sir, tell me about my godson.”

Amelia’s steely gaze was fixed on Sirius, “Lord Black, I shall ensure that you receive the proper forms for registration, see that they are promptly completed and filed.”

Xeno’s gaze had fixed on Nymphadora but the young witch made her objections known, “I was six when Harry was born and treated him like my little brother, he was just starting to say Nymie the last time I saw him. I will not leave the room while you discuss Harry because I miss him to.” Her hair had changed colour twice and she was fighting back the tears by the time she was finished.

He took out his wand and an engaged the custom made security charms he had installed in his office, “Ok, first can we stop with the ‘Sir’ nonsense, my name is Xeno. Secondly I want an oath that this information never leaves this office, I will do anything to protect that boy and never betray his trust.”

Sirius hadn’t had time to get a wand yet so swore a Black family oath that covered the three members present, allowing Harry to be discussed between them but not disclose details to anyone else. Amelia swore with the proviso that the child was in no danger and Xeno gladly accepted that.

“Harry first entered our lives on his birthday, he met my daughter and the two spent the afternoon in Diagon Alley together.”

Amelia appeared to be having an apoplexy before her voice retuned, “What! Are you telling me that Harry Potter was walking about Diagon Alley a few days ago and nobody noticed?”

Xeno couldn't help but chuckle, "They even sat and had some ice cream, he was in this office on Friday as he came back to meet my daughter again. By the time they returned from their day out, the story had broken so we didn't think it was safe anymore. My family has spent the weekend staying with him and I can assure you he's perfectly safe."

Amelia was starting to put some of the pieces together now, "Can we assume that your daughter is the pureblood friend Harry spoke of in your article? I was also wondering how the muggles became aware of the situation."

"Yes Luna is one of his best friends, the other is a muggle born girl and they have formed a very strong bond. The people Harry is now living with phoned their version of the aurors to report the abuse, on discovering Harry was missing, they immediately arrested his aunt and uncle."

Sirius burst out laughing for the first time in many years, "Oh my, James would be so proud. Not only does Harry escape, but gets them put in jail and winds up with two girlfriends." He suddenly realised that one of the girls had a father who was his only means of contacting Harry, this killed the laughter pretty quickly, "I'm sorry sir, I meant no disrespect towards you or your family. I have been denied conversation for so long it would appear the art has deserted me."

"I remember you always being like that uncle Sirius." Nymphadora's comment glossed over a potential awkward moment.

"I am desperate to see my godson Xeno and you are the only person who can help me."

"Your godson has scars covering every square inch of his back, buttocks and legs which appear to have been administered by a belt of some kind. He has a special ointment my wife brewed administered to the scars morning and night with nutrient potions to compensate for the near starvation conditions of his former dwelling. Needless to say his trust of adults is severely limited. Only the girls can breakthrough the barriers he's erected and because of that he's

beginning to trust their parents. I would never betray that trust as it would cost me something dearer than my life, my daughter's trust, respect and love. I will speak with Harry tonight and explain the situation but you must understand this may take time, weeks or even months. Everyone here has the best interests of that child at heart, his days are now spent laughing and playing with his friends and I won't let anything interfere with his happiness."

Sirius was out in seat again with his hand held out for Xeno to shake, "That opinion is shared by me, I have no intention of trying to remove him from a situation where he is happy. It would also appear he has some good people looking out for him and giving helpful advice. All I ask is for the chance to join that group and be part of his life in any capacity he wishes. If you could pass on this message the house of Black would be in your debt sir."

The reporter in Xeno was already calculating what effect the official Sirius Black story would have on the Quibbler but the father him ruthlessly suppressed those thoughts. His daughter, and therefore Harry and Hermione were much more important.

"I shall speak to him tonight and we can meet again tomorrow afternoon, I can promise nothing other than speaking on your behalf."

Sirius happily hook the man's hand, "I can ask no more and thank you and your family for their aid for Harry. I spent the worse night of my life thinking he was dead, hearing you speak of a living, laughing Harry has healed a wound in my soul. He might remember me more by my nickname; he used to call me Paddy after my dog form, Padfoot."

Sirius left the office feeling better than he had in years, with a bit of luck he would soon see his godson. First though he needed a wand and some decent clothes, Andi had offered to put him up till he got on his feet and he had quickly accepted.

Amelia left with something bothering her, she wasn't expecting to get the whole truth but the story rang true. The crowds outside prompted her with what the problem was. Although Xeno never put his name on the story, if they could all quickly reach the conclusion that he knew

Harry's whereabouts, so could others. She would have a couple of aurors watch the building for the next week at least.

-oOoOo-

Ginny Weasley sat at dinner with her family, chewing not only her food but a question that had been stewing in her brain for hours. Like most of magical Britain she had listened to the WWN broadcasting from the Wizengamot. She'd understood most of it but there was a question that just wouldn't go away, she decided to ask her dad.

Nervously playing with her hair she popped the question, "Dad, that bad wizard who got Harry Potter's parents killed could turn in to a rat?"

Arthur smiled at the girl, pleased to see she was looking better now it was known her hero was still alive, "That's right dear."

Ginny had stopped eating as her brothers started paying attention to what she was saying, "If he cut off his own finger would the rat be missing it as well?"

Arthur thought for a moment before answering his only daughter, "Yes Ginny I suppose it would, why are you asking?"

Everyone except Ron had stopped eating and was now looking at her, Ginny began to think her question was stupid, "Scabbers has a missing toe and we've had him for as long as I can remember."

Every member of the family turned to stare at Percy who was currently placing titbits of food into the pocket that held his pet rat, the said rat, realising the jig was up, shot out Percy's pocket and made a frantic break for freedom.

Unfortunately for Wormtail the current star Gryffindor seeker was also sitting at the table, as the rat tried to scurry past, Charlie Weasley moved like lightning and grabbed it by the scruff of the neck.

One stunning spell later and Arthur had his head in the fire, making a floo call to the DMLE.

A/N thanks for reading.

## Chapter 8

The three kids each appeared to get more of the stuff they were shovelling on themselves rather than in the wheel-barrow provided for the task. Both Emma and Maia were of the opinion that it was important the children take some part in caring for the animals, rather than just seeing them as expensive toys. So even though Ziggy could have completed the job with a snap of his fingers, and would probably have to do it again when the kids were finished, Harry, Hermione and Luna were currently attempting to clean out the ponies stalls.

After putting down some fresh straw they proceeded to brush their noble steeds, talking to their respective pony and each other continually while working. The three had quickly reached an understanding that had bemused the adults but set the pattern for the rest of their lives together. Instead of each of them individually choosing a pony as their favourite, they agreed to share the four ponies amongst themselves therefore not choosing one above the other. The trio would always share everything equally between them.

Dan and Emma had been taken home by Cas to prepare for the kids arrival but Maia felt that, after their riding adventures and exertions wielding shovels, a bath was in order before heading off to Hermione's home.

The trio were in the bubble laden water when two of them started to notice Hermione was apprehensive about something, "What's the matter Hermione? Both Luna and I can feel you're worried about something."

Knowing that it was not only hopeless but wrong to try and hide her feelings from her friends, Hermione told them what was bothering her. "It's just I've never had anyone over to my house before, what if you don't like it? Our bath would never fit the three of us at the same time and you've got your own library here..." Hermione was beginning to let her insecurities run away with her when she felt two pairs of arms encircle her, which had an immediate calming effect.

Harry and Luna held their friend for a minute until she'd calmed down enough to return their hug with a heart felt 'thank you.'

Still in a three way hug Harry spoke, "Until last week I lived in a cupboard that was nearly always locked from the outside, and this bath is bigger than both Dudley's bedrooms put together. As long as you're there, and your mum and dad of course, then that will be good enough for Luna and me."

Luna was nodding in agreement, "Hermione if anyone should be worried then it is me, even in our world the Lovegood house is considered odd. I love it very much so know that my friends will to."

Hermione hugged them even tighter, "Thanks you two, Harry what did you mean by Dudley's second bedroom?"

"Oh Dudley needed two bedrooms for all the stuff they bought him, it was starting to spill over into the guest bedroom as well."

Luna was puzzled so asked for an explanation, "They had all those bedrooms but made you sleep in a cupboard, why would they do that?"

Harry couldn't look his friends in the eye, "They said a freak like me didn't deserve a bedroom."

Luna lifted his chin back up, "Some people think I'm a bit strange Harry but I don't care, it's what my friends think of me that counts. They're the freaks Harry, not you." She kissed him on the cheek.

Hermione now faced him, "I've also been called names Harry and know how much they can hurt but Luna is right, don't believe them, believe us because we think you're the best friend we could ever have." She also kissed his cheek.

This time Harry didn't blush red but instead answered both girls before returning their kisses back on their cheeks, "No you both are the best, thanks."

The kids glowed in the water as their bond just went up another notch while Maia and Cas could only stand as spectators, the atmosphere inside the room was so infused with love it was almost palpable. Maia

was getting concerned because at the rate the bond was forming they would be married before attending wizarding school.

-oOoOo-

Sirius was in trouble and had only himself to blame, inviting two females along when he was shopping for robes was not one of his better ideas. It was time to see if he was still a marauder, "Dora dear, by my reckoning I owe you seven years of birthday and Christmas gifts. You can pick anything you want in the shop then we'll go and see about a new broom for you."

Her squeal of excitement told him he'd got it at least part right though the frown on Andi's face meant he still had a bit of work to do.

"Can I really pick 'anything' Sirius?" the teen asked.

The way she said anything clued Sirius into the potential problem, "As long as your mother approves, I have no idea of the latest teenage fashions and will defer to her judgement on this one."

Two smiling witches meant he had hit on the right combination, Sirius could now choose his own robes in peace while they scoured the shop for something that Dora wanted and her mother would actually allow her to wear. He was also intending to buy a broom for Harry, considering it a godfather's sworn and sacred duty to provide this service. He had wanted to buy one for Harry's first birthday, Lily threatening to perform a switching spell between his family jewels and his tonsils killed that idea stone dead. No-one messed with Lily when she put on that serious voice, not for a second time anyway.

After reading the Quibbler article and his conversation with Xeno, Sirius decided to buy brooms for Harry's two best friends as well. That was, of course, dependant on the Tonks ladies ever letting him out of Madam Malkin's.

-oOoOo-

Dan and Emma couldn't help but smile as the kids ran about the house with seemingly boundless energy, they had long hoped that

their home would ring with the sound of children's laughter but after Hermione there were no more. They had never explored the reasons behind this, preferring instead to count their blessing of the daughter they already had.

The trio were now frolicking about in the garden, having endless fun from a simple game of tag. This was immensely pleasing to Dan, take away the manor, magic and even the ponies, the kids were still happy just being kids as long as they were together. This more than anything else assured Dan of his daughter's future happiness.

They were planning on watching a movie tonight and the dentists had relaxed their sugar rules to provide pop corn and coke's for the kids to enjoy. Xeno and Maia were coming over later for supper and to see the kids were settling in alright. Their car was back in its own garage and they would be driving to work tomorrow as usual, while Hedwig took the kids to the manor. After travelling via Cas and Hedwig it would seem slow and quaint to actually have to drive to work, magic was surprisingly easy to become accustomed to.

-oOoOo-

"Are you sure we should be doing this?" asked the social worker.

"Well the longer we wait, the harder it's going to get," replied the doctor. "The final decision is yours to make but I really want to give it a shot."

"Ok, let's do it but I warn you, first sign of anything untoward and I'm pulling junior out of there,"

"Oh I can't thank you enough," replied the doctor, "I just hope it gets a reaction, nothing else has caused the slightest flutter of movement."

Dudley had been told his mum was ill and he was being allowed to visit her in hospital with the hope it would help with her recovery, nothing prepared the boy for the sight that he was now confronted with.

His mother was sitting up in bed, blankly staring straight ahead with a doctor monitoring the myriad of medical equipment in the room, all of which seemed to be hooked up to his mum by wires.

The doctor was dismayed when there was not a flicker from any of his battery of sensors connected to the woman, when her son entered the room he'd been sure this would get a reaction out of her. The doctor had been half hoping Petunia was faking her condition to avoid going to court over the treatment of her nephew, but Meryl Streep couldn't pull off a performance to fool his equipment.

Lack of reaction was not something Dudley could be accused of, he demanded his mother get up off her lazy backside and take him home. He bitterly complained about missing all his TV programs, all his toys and hadn't had second helpings even once.

The social worker had to drag him out of there as he had quickly deteriorated into a temper tantrum, something that they thought being in the orphanage had pretty much cured him of.

-oOoOo-

Albus had headed straight for the muggle hospital but the matron kept giving him seriously strange looks, he'd eventually had to use a spell on her to divert the woman's attention elsewhere long enough for him to alter Arabella's memories. The bemused old wizard couldn't understand why people were all staring at him, he'd transfigured his robes into stylish muggle attire. The only problem was that Dumbledore's version of style would have a nineteen-seventies Harlem pimp claiming it was too outlandish.

He was now entering Hogwarts when he spied his friend striding towards him, "Ah Minerva, how have your holidays been? You would never believe what..."

SLAP! The sound of McGonagall's hand connecting with Dumbledore's face reverberated around the grand entrance hall and permeated the very stone of the ancient castle. "You stupid senile old goat! I told you they were the worst kind of muggles but no, the great Albus Dumbledore knows better than everyone else. You sentenced

that child to seven years of torture and, while the Wizengamot may not have charged you, I hold you totally responsible for that child's pain and will never forgive you."

Albus was shocked, as well as stung, by her words as much as Minerva's well placed and meaty blow, but even that couldn't prepare him for what happened next. He was hoisted up in the air and found himself facing an enraged half-giant.

"Yeh made me part o' yer scheme to place tha' baby with those monsters. I should never have listened to yeh an' let Black take the little tyke. Both o' em spent seven years in prison fer nothin' an' it's all down to yeh." A raging Hagrid was not something Albus had ever seen before and he would be delighted to forgo the pleasure of a repeat performance in this lifetime or the next.

He found his feet touched the ground once more but Minerva wasn't quite finished yet, "We were originally going to resign but now we know Harry's alive we'll be staying here at Hogwarts to ensure you don't get your hooks into him. I was proud to be named in the Potter will as someone James and Lily trusted with their son and I will never let him or them down again."

The last thing Albus needed was people paying close attention to his actions, especially people who knew him well. "If you both feel we can no longer have a professional working relationship I will, with great regret, accept your resignations from Hogwarts."

"Well, if that is your decision then you will be accepting ours as well," declared Filius with Pomona nodding agreement by his side.

Albus knew his position wasn't strong enough to survive the resignations of three heads of house, he looked towards the arriving Severus for some guidance on this matter. He had honestly thought that being released from the Wizengamot would have seen the end of this problem.

Like the others, Severus had headed to discover the source of the loud slap and shouting, finding himself the unexpected centre of

attention, as his three co-heads had declared their position, he was forced to say something. "Perhaps we should defer any decisions on anyone leaving Hogwarts until after the school board meeting on Tuesday. This would give everyone time to cool down and, if Albus finds himself out of a job, makes this whole argument moot."

Dumbledore was left gaping like a guppy, he had expected Severus to rally in his defence. The fact that the head of Slytherin was playing both sides should not have come as a surprise to anyone, Snape only ever cared for one person and that was Severus Snape. Lucius would be going all out in his attempts to oust Dumbledore from the castle, alienating himself with the other three heads by aligning with Albus could see him looking for alternative employment as well. The headmaster was wily and ruthless enough to hold on to his job but it didn't hurt to plan for other eventualities.

Albus was unaccustomed to being questioned, far less almost threatened, by people who had slavishly followed his commands for years and didn't like it one bit. He could now see the logic in Snape's suggestion, going into that school board meeting having just dismissed three heads of house would almost certainly put paid to his prospects of remaining headmaster.

"I find myself in reluctant agreement with Severus and think we should postpone any and all actions until after the board has met. I fully intend to be here to greet our students on the first of September and expect the full support from my staff. Anyone who has difficulties with that can submit their resignation to me on Wednesday morning."

With that Albus strode away in the direction of his office, displaying as much dignity as a man with a ladies bright red handprint on his face can muster.

-oOoOo-

Xeno heard the scream for help and burst into the room with his wand drawn, just in time to see the little girl get carried away by a hoard of flying monkeys. The three kids never even blinked as the screen demanded their full concentration, Dan however rolled about laughing at the sight of Xeno standing with his wand pointed at their television.

The Grangers had prepared a buffet supper that everyone enjoyed after the movie which, once he realised there was no inherent danger, Xeno had loved.

Luna was looking very thoughtful so decided to try and find some answers, "Mr Granger, can I ask you a question?"

"Of course Luna but we're going to be seeing a lot of each other from now on so could you and Harry please call us Dan and Emma, Mr Granger makes me feel old."

"Does that mean mum is Auntie Em?" Hermione asked cheekily.

"Why you little scamp," said Emma playfully as she grabbed Hermione only to see absolute terror in Harry's face.

Luna and Hermione quickly comforted their bondmate as Emma sank to her knees to be the same height as the terrified boy, "Harry we have never hit Hermione and have no intention of starting, Dan and I don't believe in smacking a child as a form of discipline. I was about to pull Hermione in and tickle her, never ever to hurt her."

Harry stared at the woman who looked back at him with Hermione's eyes and his barriers came crashing down, "I always wanted an Auntie Em, somebody to love me no matter what and who I would be desperate to come home to."

Emma opened her arms and Harry moved into them, "Harry I would be proud to be your Auntie Em and have no trouble loving you, you really are a wonderful wizard."

Dan had a lump in his throat and knew he was close to tears as he watched his wife and Harry hold on to one another like a life preserver in rough seas, he as aware that this probably was not the time to introduce humour to the situation but it was either that or blubber like an acceptance speech on Oscar night. "Who does that make me, Uncle Henry or Toto? Anyone saying cowardly lion gets to listen to my Willie Nelson LP's"

Hermione burst out laughing which started everyone else off, the Lovegoods had no idea what an LP was, far less Nelson's Willie but it sounded funny so they laughed along with Hermione.

Xeno saw the opening he was looking for and took it, "Harry your parents will has been read and this led to your godfather, Sirius Black, getting a trial. He was put in prison at the same time you were left with your aunt, even though the will said you hadn't to go there and gave a list of people your parents trusted with your care. The minute he was released from prison he headed for my office and is desperate to see you, he stressed that if you were safe and happy then he had no intention of trying to claim some form of guardianship over you. I also met with another three of the people on that list and all were concerned for your welfare, oh your godfather said you might remember him by his nick-name of Paddy."

They could see the emotions on Harry's face, it appeared to be equal parts recognition and confusion. "The only Paddy that I have any memory of is a big black dog that used to curl up beside me and we would sleep in front of the fire, just about the only other memory I have is a flying motorbike and a giant so I assumed these were all just dreams."

Xeno smiled at the boy, "No Harry, your godfather is what's called an Animagus. He can turn into a specific animal and in his case it's a big black dog, he actually transformed in my office because he remembered your scent and could tell I had been near you. He said you used to ride around the room on his back while your dad held you."

"Why was the man in prison?" asked Dan rather protectively.

"He was put in prison without a trial because some powerful people wanted him out of the way. He swore Harry that, had he known you were staying with those people, he would have somehow broken out to rescue you, he was one of the people who signed the will and knew you hadn't to be placed there."

Harry thought about it for a minute, still in his Auntie Em's arms, before giving an answer, "I know I have to start trusting people, and that you would be there with me, but I think I want to talk to my grandparents first before making my mind up."

Emma hugged him tighter, "I think that's the right thing to do Harry."

Xeno nodded in agreement, "I'm meeting him tomorrow afternoon and just knowing you remember Paddy will make him very happy. I'll let him know you're thinking about it unless you send Cas or Hedwig to tell me otherwise."

Everyone seemed happy with that decision before Dan suddenly remembered something, "Luna dear, you never got to ask your question."

"Well I pretty much followed what was happening in the movie right up until the end. Why did a bucket of water melt the witch?"

Dan looked open mouthed at his wife who also had no answer, looks like he was on his own with this one. "Nobody is quite sure Luna, one answer is that her soul was so unclean, pure water would melt her." He took a moment to organise his thoughts on the matter before continuing, "I think it was more to do with Dorothy trying to save someone she cared about, the scarecrow was on fire from a curse the wicked witch had cast on him. When Dorothy used the water she not only extinguished the flames, defeating the curse, but the water also caught the witch at the same time. This could be seen as the witch's own curse being fired back at her but I prefer to think it was the love Dorothy had for her friends that defeated evil."

Xeno and Maia were amazed at Dan's analysis and how closely it paralleled the boy who Emma currently had nestling in her arms. The main difference being his mother had died to provide the love that fired that curse back against evil, it even looked as if Harry had finally made it home to find his Auntie Em.

-oOoOo-

Peter awoke to find himself in human form, chained to a chair in a brightly lit room, with a wand almost up his nose, "Just try and transform," growled Amelia, "A reducto is way quicker than you and I'm just dying to exterminate a rat."

There was no room for misunderstanding, Peter was sure she wouldn't hesitate to carry out her threat. He opened his mouth like a good little death eater and allowed her to place some truth serum on his tongue when ordered, pretty soon his eyes were glazing over.

If anything Amelia was playing this one even closer to her chest than the Crouches, when Arthur had contacted her she'd floo'd immediately to the Burrow. After casting a spell to reveal that the unconscious rat was indeed an Animagus, Amelia had quickly re-stunned the rodent before swearing the Weasleys to secrecy and headed back to the ministry with the rat.

Apart from the Weasleys, only herself and now Augusta knew the traitor had been found. The plan was to discover what the rat knew beforehand then take whatever actions were necessary to round up any accomplices, what they really wanted was names of death eaters.

Both women were now ready to begin the interrogation.

"What is your name?"

"Peter Pettigrew."

"Are you a death eater?"

"Yes."

"Did you betray the Potters?"

"Yes."

"Did you kill those muggles in the street?"

"Yes."

“Do you know the names of any death eaters who are not currently in Azkaban?”

“Yes.”

Amelia was getting impatient with these one-word answers, “Tell us the names?”

“Lucius Malfoy.”

There was a sharp intake of breath from both witches, this would be enough to get some truth serum into the blond ponce. “Do you know any others?”

“No, the dark lord wanted me as his spy so only Lucius knew about me, he was the one who recruited me into my master’s service.”

“Did Lucius know you were the Potter secret keeper?”

“Yes, he was the dark lord’s top death eater.”

Both women were now trying to hide their excitement, revealing those facts in the Wizengamot chamber would negate even Fudge’s protection, forcing Malfoy into the chair and the accompanying application of truth serum. If he was second only to his dark master then he should be able to name all the death eaters and finally put paid to this ‘I was under the imperius’ pish.

Augusta left to call an emergency meeting of the Wizengamot for tomorrow afternoon while Amelia poured a potion down Pettigrew’s throat that countered his ability to transform for a week. The head of the DMLE personally thought Pettigrew wouldn’t see out a week but there was nothing wrong with being on the right side of cautious.

After stunning him again she locked him in a cell before summoning a pair of aurors.

"Your job is to stand here and make sure nobody goes in or out this cell, the only exceptions being myself or Madam Longbottom. Speak to anyone about this and you'll be on night time foot patrol through Diagon Alley for the rest of your short auror careers."

Madam Bones was well renowned as a woman of her word so neither auror would be saying diddly-squat about tonight's assignment.

-oOoOo-

Sirius was knackered, he was lying in an actual real bed for the first time in seven years. While his body was screaming for rest from his unaccustomed activity, who would have thought shopping could be such hard work, his mind refused to surrender to sleep. It preferred instead to dream of the meeting he was going to have wth his godson. He had considered trying to contact Remus but decided to concentrate on getting to know Harry first, being introduced to one of his parent's best friends would be enough for the lad to handle for now. Sirius glanced over at the three cleansweep brooms sitting against the wall and would give anything to be able to teach his godson to fly.

Sirius tried not to think of the way Harry had been raised because that brought his anger racing to the surface and the last thing his godson needed to see was an angry stranger. He was also going to have to modify his behaviour, at least until they got to know one another. This would mean no pranks, no teasing about having two girlfriends already and definitely no pretend wrestling or playful punches to his arm.

He felt certain that he was going to receive a positive answer tomorrow which was another reason he couldn't surrender to sleep, it was so long since he'd had something to be excited about he didn't want to go to sleep and lose this feeling.

Tomorrow was going to be something special and change the course of his life forever, he could feel it in his bones.

-oOoOo-

Dudley didn't need to feel it in his bones to recognise that his life had changed beyond any recognition, the evidence was all around him. His father was dead, his mother might as well be, he overheard the doctor say something about vegetables but she couldn't even feed herself, never mind him. His only other relative, Aunt Marge was in jail for her treatment of that freak Potter, no Dudley didn't need a road map to see that his life had undergone a dramatic change in direction.

He was currently on the roof of the five-story high orphanage without having to be chased there, the pile of cigarette butts explaining why the door wasn't securely locked. He'd heard two of the older boys arguing over who was going to get the pleasure of 'breaking him in' and, even though he didn't know what that meant, Dudley was sure it wasn't good.

Looking over the rooftops towards the horizon all Dudley could see was the harsh reality that the old life he loved was well and truly over. His new life consisted of almost constant abuse, being hit every time the workers turned their backs and terrified to close his eyes in the dorm at night.

This was now what Dudley had to look forward to as a future, no piles of presents, no mountains of food and no freak to take out his frustrations on. This was not a future that Dudley Dursley was prepared or even capable of accepting, with this in mind he took the only option that he perceive was available to him, Dudley Dursley calmly stepped off the roof.

-oOoOo-

'Auntie Em' was currently tucking her three charges up in bed, Xeno and Maia had already headed home. As she kissed the children Harry spoke, "Thanks Auntie Em, there really is no place like home."

Emma was trying not to laugh and spoil the moment as Harry was deadly serious, "I'm flattered Harry that you just got here and already think of it as home, I just hope you're not going to start wearing ruby riding boots." His reply almost had her in tears.

“Home is not a place Auntie Em, it’s wherever we are as long as we’re together. Home is Hermione and Luna.” This earned the young wizard a couple of kisses from his best friends.

Dan entered the room to discover why there was an incredibly bright light coming out Hermione’s door, the three kids were snuggling into each other and that was the source of the illuminations. The beautiful smiles on the kid’s faces took any apprehension away from the situation, Dan wrapped his arms around his beautiful wife and gently led her in the direction of their own bedroom to attempt some magic of their own.

Fate looked down on the three now sleeping children and sighed, she could wait no longer. Tomorrow would be the day when the scales had to be balanced though Fate had unexpectedly been handed a bit of leeway. Unlike his parents, the child’s life was never part of the equation but could be used as such now. It was ironic that when his life began to mirror that of his cousin, the boy couldn’t cope and hadn’t lasted a week.

Events had already been set in motion but she could now allow external factors to interfere on the children’s behalf. She was privately rooting for the trio and hoping the bond was strong enough to survive, sometimes Fate really, really hated her job.

A/N Thanks for reading

## Chapter 9

Breakfast at the Grangers was an unusually happy affair, for normal Hermione had to be practically dragged out of bed and Dan didn't speak a word until well into his second cup of coffee. Today the kids were looking forward to their lesson on magic, followed by an afternoon of learning to ride so were understandably happy and excited.

Dan was actually trying to whistle what sounded like 'you were always on my mind' but it was hard to tell, the expansive grin that appeared permanently plastered on his face didn't particularly lend itself to tuneful whistling.

Emma was almost blushing every time Dan caught her eye so it was with some relief that they said cheerio to the kids as Hedwig flamed them over to the manor. Dan's arms immediately snaked around his wife as he started to kiss her neck, "You keep that up and we might not see work today," she moaned.

"Would that be such a bad thing?" he asked between kisses. "What's the point of being the boss if we can't bunk off for a day."

The idea was starting to sound more attractive to Emma the more Dan kissed her, she had to be strong. "You've never bunked off a day in your life!"

"True," he answered, "But I think the kids must be starting to affect us because I just don't want to let you out of my sight."

Emma giggled like a giddy schoolgirl, "Dan, we work in the same practice, I won't be out of your sight all day."

"Well we're giving our staff an extended lunch break and locking the doors. Tonight I plan on taking my beautiful wife out to dinner, followed by dancing and then to bed where you can make as much noise as you like since the house will be empty."

This declaration was followed by a lung-searing kiss that left both of them breathless as they reluctantly made their way out to the car, Emma wasn't sure if Dan was joking about lunchtime but suspected not, she would send the two girls off to lunch herself if it came to that.

-oOoOo-

Dumbledore's mood couldn't have provided a sharper contrast to that of the Granger household, he couldn't risk Harry having competent people around him and becoming Lord Potter at eleven. He needed to get control of the boy but, before he could even attempt that, he needed to find him first.

His plans for Harry to meet his tragic end in first year were all in place, he needed to be the boy's guardian by then or he wouldn't inherit the Potter fortune. All he needed to do was circumvent Black, his cousin Andromeda, Minerva and Amelia Bones in the next two years, shouldn't be too hard for a wizard of his potential.

The goblin's not speaking to him closed that avenue of approach, leaving the old wizard with only one road left to take. Xeno Lovegood was an experienced reporter though and to approach him directly might set off his alarm bells before Albus could get any information. If Xeno had acquired a scoop of that magnitude Albus reckoned his wife would have heard all about it, remembering that she worked from home, Dumbledore thought it was perhaps time to pay Maia Lovegood a little visit at that abomination they called a house.

-oOoOo-

Lucius felt unsettled, that was a very close call he'd had with Barty Crouch Jr. yesterday, and he was certain Longbottom and Bones would be trying to engineer any opportunity to question him under truth serum. As he well knew, Fudge could easily be manipulated and those two witches could have Cornelius signing his arrest warrant without the fool even realising it.

Getting his hands on Potter would secure his future, the imperious or one of Snape's more illegal potions would keep the brat toeing the line. A visit to the Quibbler was called for, Lucius was used to getting

what he wanted and the only question was just how far he would be forced to go. The first phase was offering influence and gold for the information, moving swiftly to veiled threats straight into downright intimidation. After that it was time to draw his wand and get creative, this method had never failed him yet and he was confident it would stand him in good stead again today.

Xeno Lovegood was about to discover why Lucius was the Dark Lord's right hand man.

-OOoOo-

Maia had a warm glow of contentment as she prepared her lab for today's experiment; Xeno had been even more amorous than usual as they enjoyed having the house to themselves for the first time in many years. With the kids staying here tonight Maia was starting to think that these arrangements would work better than they thought possible, with the children clearly enjoying their new lives as well.

Her good mood evaporated when a voice shouted, 'anyone home?' Maia was left contemplating how this person had by-passed their wards and how she was going to get her hands on her wand. She was shocked when Albus Dumbledore came down the stairs into her lab, "Ah Maia, how good to see you again. Horace would be so pleased to see one of his favourite pupils using her skills to advance the art of potions."

It suddenly became clear to Maia why the old wizard was here so she used the excuse of her task not to look Dumbledore in the eye, "Good morning professor, please excuse me but I can't leave this at the moment. What brings you all the way down here?"

"Oh I was hoping to catch Xeno before he headed for the office, that was quite the story he published."

She was now certain he was looking for Harry, "Yes he was so excited one of his reporters got lucky, but you know Xeno, he's so protective of his staff and sources he probably doesn't tell himself half the things he knows."

Dumbledore laughed as he tried to figure out whether she was deliberately avoiding eye contact or just dedicated to her task, "Where is young Luna? It won't be too long before we'll be seeing her at Hogwarts, I would lay odds she'll be a Ravenclaw like her parents."

"She stayed at a friend's last night, the girls seemed so happy playing together that we allowed her to stay over. She's got three more years to wait for the Hogwarts Express, the disadvantage of being born in the Autumn."

Albus was convinced she was avoiding his direct gaze and therefore had something to hide, her comment about Xeno playing things close to his chest just might be true though. He didn't want to show his hand without being guaranteed the information he was looking for. There was more than one way to get information though, Xeno was devoted to Maia and if something should happen to her, Albus offering comfort should be able to get anything he wanted from the distraught wizard.

"Yes I sometimes think the September first cut-off date is a bit harsh to those born just after it but there has to be a date and that one has stood the test of time for centuries. You are obviously very busy and don't need the ramblings of a doddering old wizard disturbing your work. I shall leave you in peace to continue and look up Xeno later today."

As Dumbledore left, Maia couldn't shake the deep feeling of apprehension that gripped her, the old wizard left much too easy for her liking. She began to carefully examine her lab and was horrified at what she discovered, the cooling charm on some of her most dangerous ingredients had been replaced with a heating charm. As the Erumpent fluid began to bubble Maia's knowledge told her it was too late, her body though was moving, diving behind the heavy lab bench as the jar exploded with the contents bursting into flames. As more and more of her stored ingredients were exploding or burning Maia just had time to give thanks that Luna wasn't in the house, the chain reaction soon went critical and escaped the containment of the lab.

Outside Albus was hidden awaiting the results of his meddling; he had stopped trying to justify his actions as being for ‘the greater good’, the only good he wanted at the moment was access to Potter. If a young witch had to die in a tragic accident for Albus to acquire the information he needed then he wasn’t going to lose any sleep over the matter.

The results were beyond anything Albus could have envisioned; an explosion ripped through the lab’s containment field and blasted the living area into smithereens. The resulting fire finished the job of leaving the two remaining Lovegoods homeless; perhaps he could offer them sanctuary. It was this thought that sparked Dumbledore’s next idea, he needed people to think Britain was still a dangerous place with only Albus Dumbledore being able to stand against the darkness. This was just too good an opportunity to miss as Albus cast the terrifying mark that hadn’t been seen for nearly seven years above the wreckage of what was no longer a family’s home.

Prudence dictated he make a hasty exit so Albus apparated back to Hogwarts.

-oOoOo-

Xeno was wondering how Malfoy got into his office, he was not someone that the Quibbler’s owner would have chosen to meet.

“Mr Lovegood I can’t thank you enough for that wonderful story confirming our saviour is still alive, my family and I were so relieved by the news the child was safe. I can’t help but wonder though if the advice he’s receiving will properly prepare him for taking his rightful place in wizarding society. I personally feel the child would be better brought into the pureblood fold, the person responsible for assisting with this feat would undoubtedly find themselves suitably rewarded.”

Xeno decided to nip this conversation in the bud, he didn’t like the direction it was taking, “Lord Black, Madam Bones, Mrs Tonks and Professor McGonagall are all eminently capable of ensuring the lad knows his place in our society. They also have the advantage of having been named by his parents as people they trusted to be involved in the raising of their child. All have been in contact with me,

stating their willingness to play any part in the boy's life but agreed the final decision is Harry Potter's."

Lucius was not used to being interrupted, far less so rudely put in his place. In pureblood society Lovegoods words, while polite, were the equivalent of being told to piss off and mind your own business. "I see you had a busy day yesterday Mr Lovegood, it must be difficult having been thrown into the spotlight like this. You must have safety concerns over your wife and young daughter, especially with Dumbledore alluding to the return of the dark lord; it would be a tragedy if the madness started again with the boy as the main target. I can't help but feel the child would be safer behind the ancient wards of a prominent pureblood family home."

The conversation was beginning to turn nasty but, at the moment, Xeno was more concerned with holding his temper and not giving information away involuntary, "My wife is more than capable of holding her own while Luna is protected like you wouldn't believe. If the madness should start again my family would once more be at the forefront of the light side, I hope to see you there." Xeno deliberately left the last bit vague, he was positive there was more chance of him facing Malfoy than fighting along side him. The mental image of Hedwig ripping the face of anyone trying to harm his Luna put a rye smile on the editor's face.

Lucius was struggling to understand this situation, the man just point-blank refused to be intimidated. Perhaps it was because he wasn't wearing his death eater robes and mask, this procedure had never failed before. When he saw the smile on Xeno's face Malfoy lost it, pulled his wand from his cane and fired off an imperious curse at the grinning buffoon.

Xeno was a long time practitioner of Occlumency and the instant the curse hit he heard Maia's voice telling him to fight it, he threw it off mere seconds later, much to the horror of a now shocked Lucius Malfoy. The ward system in Xeno's office was custom built and tailored to his specific requirements, the use of an unforgivable curse set off alarms throughout the building.

"It's over Malfoy, the aurors will be here very shortly so I would suggest you lay down that wand and accept your punishment like a man."

With a reasonable person this request might have worked, with Malfoy there wasn't a hope in hell of him laying down his wand. Lucius heard the alarm, though to him it was his death knell, with only truth serum and a Dementors kiss waiting for him if he lowered his wand. The panicked death eater fired the killing curse at the editor and fled the office.

Xeno had a surprised expression on his face as the green beam hit him from a distance of about a meter, his dead body slumped to the office floor.

The alarm was heard by the two aurors that Amelia had stationed covertly outside the Quibbler office, they didn't know what it meant but figured it bore investigation. They had just entered the building when Lucius burst out the office as if being chased by an angry dragon, "Stop! Ministry Aurors!"

The auror's call was met by a barrage of curses as the now fleeing figure made off in the direction of the print room, trying to escape the building's wards so he could apparate home. The two aurors were hot on his heels though as they traded curses back and forth. Dodging between the heavy printing presses in a deadly game of hide and seek, Lucius spotted an exit door though his way would soon be blocked by the advancing aurors.

Making up his mind he sprinted for the door only to be clipped by an auror stunner. This had the effect of spinning the wizard round and throwing him against the press, of all the things that Lucius considered could lead to his downfall, vanity wouldn't have been high on his list. There was no time to contemplate this development though as his long blond hair became entangled in the rapidly moving mechanical mechanism, quickly pulling the rest of him in.

Lucius Malfoy was usually delighted when his face made the front cover of a publication but this was extreme, even for him. The powerful press had crushed his head like an egg, plastering his face

all over page one with the headline ‘Harry Potter Lives!’ poetically stamped on the deceased death eater’s forehead.

Health & Safety regulations had yet to reach the wizarding world so with no safety guards or automatic cut-off switches it wasn’t until the aurors had finished unloading their breakfasts that the press was finally turned off. Thankfully the wizarding world did have silencing charms and the one permanently placed on the press had at least spared both aurors the soundtrack that would have accompanied the horrific sight before them.

-oOoOo-

Dan and Emma’s flirting had continued unabated in the car as they drove along their familiar route to work, so much so that Dan was seriously considering pulling in to the nearest hotel and spending the day making love to his beautiful wife. These pleasant deliberations were at the forefront of his mind as he drove round a bend to find his windscreen full of truck.

Chelsea was furious, her daddy had paid a fortune for this truck. It had alloy wheels, steel bull bars and enough lights for her to hold her own disco but the shitty cassette player had just chewed her new George Michael tape. The eighteen year old was so focused on trying to remove her latest favourite cassette from the malfunctioning machine that she never even saw the fast approaching bend, far less the Granger’s car. She was doing nearly fifty miles per hour when she ploughed headlong into them.

Steel bull bars were designed to protect the occupants of the vehicle when they collided with a kangaroo in the Australian outback, since there were relatively few kangaroos bouncing about the British countryside they had become nothing more than a lethal fashion accessory. The British police force were currently lobbying for legislation that would ban these from their roads as, in crashes involving steel bull bars, the serious injury and fatality figures increased by a factor of ten.

The Granger's once gleaming car was reduced to a pile of scrap metal with Dan dying instantly, Emma would join her husband by the time they had cut her out the car and got her to a hospital.

-oOoO-

The children were all happily chatting to the Potters and Cas about their adventures at the Grangers, Harry brought up the subject that had been on his mind since last night. "Granddad, do you know a wizard called Sirius Black?"

Jonathan nodded, "He was your father's best friend and your godfather..."

Luna's tortured scream shattered the morning and demanded everyone's attention as she began pleading with Hedwig, "My mum girl, get my mum, please hurry"

Hedwig was gone but returned seconds later with a shaking Maia Lovegood, she soon found herself entangled by her distraught daughter. "Mum oh mum, that blond man just killed daddy with a green light and I couldn't do anything about it. I'm sorry mum, I'm so sorry." Luna was sobbing uncontrollably before screaming again and once more calling for Hedwig, "The Grangers girl, help the Grangers." The little girl fainted before Hedwig returned with a bleeding and barely breathing Emma, one glance at her mother caused Hermione's eyes to roll in her head as she joined Luna by fainting.

Harry had managed to catch Luna and lower her gently to the floor just it time to catch Hermione, he used Wingardium Leviosa to place the girls one at a time on the couch. Martha was watching Cas, Maia and Hedwig working on Emma but Jonathon had witnessed the feat of magic his grandson had performed, his power and control was awesome for a nine year old.

Maia was sure her time was up as the lab burned, one second she was glad Luna wasn't there and the next she was in her arms, Hedwig's appearance couldn't have been cut any finer. She was understandably elated to escape certain death but then felt her inside's crumble at the news her husband had been murdered, Luna

was never wrong and her daughter had no idea the killing curse was green.

Even Luna screaming and fainting drew no reaction from the witch, it took the sight of her new friend lying seriously injured on the floor to pull her out of her grief stricken stupor. She had to put her husband to the back of her mind for now and try not to think of why Hedwig hadn't returned with Dan as well.

Emma was in a bad way, her face looked horrific but Maia's scans showed that was mostly superficial, it was her chest area that had her worried as her ribs were cracked and broken with internal injuries being detected as well. Her legs were a mess, both had shattered bones that were beyond her skill to repair, she hadn't realised she'd been talking out loud until Martha answered her. "With her legs that badly damaged perhaps it would be better to vanish the bones, repair the flesh and then use skele-gro to re-grow them.

Cas had conjured a low bed for Emma while Hedwig's tears were healing her chest, the elf opened Emma's mouth and Hedwig cried tears directly into it. Maia thought Martha's suggestion of vanishing the bones was a good one so cast the spell and began healing the wounds where bone had actually pierced through the skin. She saw Cas administering a blood replenishing potion and start to remove the bits of glass from Emma's face and head.

Turning round she spied Harry with an arm around each girl but his body was shaking and Maia heard him say "My fault, all my fault. He promised terrible things would happen if I told."

Maia placed her hands either side of Harry's face to make sure she had his attention, "Listen to me Harry, there may be blame for today but none of it belongs to you. The man who told you that is dead and can't harm you any more. Xeno could have given that story to someone else but he was a reporter and you gave him the biggest story of his life, without Hedwig I wouldn't be here, without you Luna would have been in the house with me. Does Hedwig know what happened to the Grangers?"

"She says their car was hit by another and that Dan is dead."

"I thought that when she didn't bring him here but think Harry, without that wonderful phoenix so would Emma be, without you Hermione would have been in the car as well. You didn't cause this Harry, you and Hedwig saved us all."

Harry could see what Maia was saying but didn't feel it was entirely true, "Luna saved everyone, she's such a special girl, so is Hermione."

Maia tried to smile but couldn't quite pull it off, "You're special too Harry, the girls are going to need you even more now." Harry held them both tighter as Maia brought them round.

Hermione tried to dive over to her mother but Harry held her tight, "Let Cas and Hedwig finish working on her then we'll all go over, she's going to be ok." Harry was trying to be reassuring but it came out more like a question for Maia.

"Emma's going to be ok, she's going to have to take a potion to regrow the bones in her legs but she'll be good as new after that."

Hermione knew the answer but had to ask, "And my Dad?"

Harry held her tight as he answered, "Hedwig says it was a car crash and Dan didn't have a chance."

He now had two sobbing girls in his arms as they tried to take comfort from each other, there was nothing for Harry to do except hold them close and let them cry. Luna's speech was punctuated by sobs, "Mum our house and everything we own is gone. There is some kind of black mark floating above it. I saw the flames and sent Hedwig to you as soon as I could but didn't get any warning with dad or your parents Hermione. I'm so sorry."

The three children were all now fiercely holding on to one another, "Luna you saved my mum, there's nothing to be sorry for, thank you, thank you..."

Hermione was interrupted by Harry, “Luna you’re saying here with your mum, we can go shopping for everything that we need when Auntie Em is better.”

They heard Emma croak, “Hermione?” and a herd of wild horses couldn’t have held Hermione back from seeing her mum.

Hermione dived over to her mum but then stood back, she really wanted to hold her tight but was afraid she would hurt her, Cas helped Hermione out, “Just hold her hand for now Hermione, her injuries are still healing and we’re waiting on Ziggy returning with some potions.”

Hermione sat crying while holding her mum’s hand as Maia explained what had happened to both their husbands, she felt a painful jolt in her chest and looked round to see Harry sitting on the sofa by himself. Both girls had felt it and went to grab him, bringing the now crying boy into the group. Emma reached for his hand, “Harry in times of trouble family cling to one another for support, we’re all family here son and we will get through this. Maia tells me I have to re-grow all the bones in my legs and I can’t take anything for the pain as it might affect the potion, can you look after the girls for us?” Harry couldn’t talk, only nod.

Maia spoke to Luna and Hermione, “You have to look after Harry, none of this is your fault. Be there for each other, be strong for each other, we will get through this as a family.”

Ziggy had returned with the potions so Maia and Emma got three sets of hugs and kisses before the kids headed off to what was once Harry’s room but was now theirs.

Both women were now openly weeping as the children had left and their grief surfaced, Cas made Emma as comfortable as she could as Maia administered the skele-gro. Maia then sat by her friend as they held hands and cried for their departed husbands.

Cas was seething inside, this was not an emotion that was becoming to a house elf but she didn’t give a shit! Someone had attacked her family and she refused to stand idly by while it happened again. The

pain of loosing Miss Lily had never truly left but seeing her son had given her life new purpose, Cas would break any traditions or laws to ensure the boy and his bonded survived.

The boy and his bonded were currently sitting in a circle with hands joined on their massive bed, all had tears streaming down their faces.

“I’m so sorry girls, I know it’s my fault that your fathers are gone and I’ll understand if we can no longer be friends.”

Luna answered first, “Harry my father had a very dangerous job, saying something about the wrong somebody can get you killed in our world. Dad always believed in telling the truth and he was so happy he could let everyone know you were still alive. My gift is getting stronger but I had no way of seeing this, our parents and your grandparents didn’t see this coming either so I’m sorry but you are not to blame for any of this.”

Hermione went next, “Harry my dad drove that road twice a day for years and would still have been on it whether I had met you or not. The difference would have been that my mum would be dead also, and perhaps me as well, I have nothing to blame you for Harry, only thanks for what I have.”

Luna couldn’t even look at Harry as she asked, “We sat on this very bed and promised to be best friends forever, did you mean that promise Harry? I don’t think I could handle losing you as well.”

“Of course I did Luna,” he leaned forward to give her a reassuring kiss on the cheek, just as Luna turned to face him and their lips met. As kisses go it was no more than a peck but both could feel the change instantly, the pain in Harry’s chest lessened considerably to be replaced by a nice warm glow. As the kiss ended Harry looked directly into Luna’s eyes and reaffirmed his promise, “Forever Luna.” Her reply of “Forever Harry,” started quite a light show.

He turned to Hermione and his raised eyebrow asked the question, her immediate small nod of acceptance saw Harry lean in for his first kiss that wasn’t accidental. It may have lasted a few seconds longer

but that was due to the revelation that kissing someone you liked wasn't bad at all, Harry's pain left him to be replaced by a feeling of peace and contentment that he'd never known before. Both reaffirmed their commitment and the resulting light show from the trio verged on the spectacular. Even though it was barely lunchtime, the still tearful trio lay down and were soon asleep. Both Mrs Potters held on tightly to their new husband as a sobbing elf stood unseen in the corner, it was time for Cas to get some answers.

-oOoOo-

Cas appeared at the crash scene in her human disguise, dressed in a business suit and clutching a briefcase, it was time to put all those lonely night's watching telly and Mistress Lily's training to use.

The emergency services were there in numbers and Dan's body had already been removed from the wreckage of what was once a very nice car. Fear gripped Cas's heart at this sight because, had Hermione also been in the car her life would have hung on what side she chose to sit on. Behind her father she would undoubtedly been killed with at least serious injuries being inflicted had she chosen the other seat. The thought of one of her family not only badly injured but orphaned just made Cas all the more determine to discover just what had happened.

It took less than two minutes for the facts to fall into place, she had intended introducing herself as a lawyer representing the Granger family and had conjured paperwork in her briefcase to support her identity but listening to the other driver speak was all the information Cas needed. Her use of 'Daddy' at least twice in every sentence was a common occurrence in the wizarding world where pampered princesses and princes had for decades been getting away with murder because of who their father was. This particular father had placed his daughter in what amounted to an armoured car, with no concern that anything she hit would probably die, only his daughter's life counted.

This appeared to be purely an accident so Cas disappeared to the Quibbler building, as herself but invisible to all but other elves. The name 'Lucius Malfoy' was on everyone's lips, apparently he'd

murdered Xeno and then been chased by aurors before being mangled by a machine. He obviously attempted to get information on Harry out of Xeno, it was also obvious he failed and had paid the ultimate price for it. Perhaps letting the world know her young master was still alive was not such a good idea after all.

The Lovegood home was no longer there, a pile of ashes was all that remained of the strange house. A family of red-heads were there, with the little girl laying a bouquet of flowers beside the site before running back to be comforted by her mother. It suddenly hit Cas that people thought Maia and Luna were dead, there would be serious discussions this time before alerting anyone to their status. The potion ingredients must have fuelled the fire to cause this amount of destruction, Maia hadn't said yet what happened but the dark mark made her one of the few to escape the death eaters. There was nothing to learn and certainly nothing salvageable here, Cas had one last stop before returning to her family.

-oOoOo-

Amelia and Augusta were two scary witches at the best of times, this was not the best of times so people were staying well clear of the two most powerful women in wizarding Britain. Their carefully laid plan was now up in smoke as the wizard who they wanted to question no longer had the information in his head, he no longer had anything in his head as the printing press had splattered the contents all over the room. Dumbledore was already making noises, signalling he was willing to return to the Wizengamot in their hour of need, she had already informed the Prophet that their 'hour of need' was brought about by the previous administration not doing their job properly in the first place. Pettigrew's capture and testimony, combined with Malfoy being caught in the act was hopefully going to give them the impetus to have some old cases re-opened. The scale of the 'mistakes' alone warranted re-trials and both would be leaning on Fudge to give his backing. With both Malfoy and Dumbledore out the picture, and two death eater attacks in the same day, there was a fair chance of success.

They also planned to claw at least half the Malfoy fortune to be given to the Lovegood descendants for the murder of Xeno and organising the attack on their home. The goblins would know the next in line but it was more important to deny Voldemort resources should he return.

Amelia had also learned from her contacts that Dumbledore was going to be losing his position of Supreme Mugwump when the ICW met tonight, unfortunately recent events would probably see him hold onto Hogwarts headmaster, with the death eater threat now a reality, board members would prefer him there for their children's safety.

They were about to head out for Pettigrew's trial when a piece of parchment appeared on Amelia's desk.

Dear Amelia

This morning I was paid a short visit by Albus Dumbledore, as he left I discovered that some of the safety charms on my ingredients had been reversed. I have no proof he carried this out and was exceedingly fortunate to escape with my life, for the safety of my daughter we think its best that this information remains between us for the moment. Luna's safety is also uppermost in my mind when we decided to remain hidden and let everyone think we are dead, had we made the same decision with Harry I would probably still have my husband and home. I would ask you to honour this decision as it was not taken lightly, my family is all I have left and I would do anything to protect them.

Maia Lovegood.

Augusta could understand the mother's point, they had no proof Dumbledore carried out the deed and he must have cast the dark mark himself to create panic and sow confusion. She would quite happily roast the old bastard on a spit over an open fire but even she had to admit the old bugger had style.

They would proceed with their plan, with the compensation now going quietly to Luna. Dumbledore would be left with only Hogwarts as his power base, with that situation closely monitored. They would root out

these death eaters in their society, even if they had to get rid of Fudge to achieve it.

-oOoOo-

Sirius Black sat in the Three Broomsticks with a bottle of Firewhisky on the table in front of him, even the news that the rat was sentenced to the kiss couldn't brighten his mood. His only contact with Harry was well and truly gone and the young lad would understandably be suspicious of trusting anyone after this morning's events. The goblins too were shocked, his welcome there was nowhere near as cordial as it had been before, until this mess was sorted everyone was a suspect.

The years had not dimmed the pain when hearing of a mother and child being murdered by death eaters, that this was one of his godson's best friends would mean Harry would be devastated, Sirius only wished there was some way he could help.

"Is this a private party or can anyone join in?" the female voice asked.

Sirius looked at a vaguely familiar female before replying, "Sorry Miss, I'm probably not the best of company at the moment, you would be better speaking to someone else."

The woman sat across from him and leaned in so her voice wouldn't carry too far, "That's not what you said the last time we spoke Sirius, you spent nearly fifteen minutes giving me reasons why I should go out with you. If my memory serves me well it was only Mistress Lily threatening to castrate you that changed your mind, that and my true identity. I also seem to recall you offering Master James your motorbike if he didn't tell the other marauders what had happened."

The memory of the most embarrassing night of his life shot to the front of his mind. Sirius was using all his best lines on the pretty girl but getting nowhere before Lily entered and went mental. It wasn't till the girl showed her true appearance and James was literally on the floor, laughing his arse off that he, Sirius Black, discovered he'd just spent the last quarter of an hour chatting up a house elf.

“Cas?”

She nodded.

“Oh this is great news, Harry’s with you?”

She nodded again.

“I have to see him Cas, I’m begging here. Please let me see my godson.”

“Maia was in the house herself and managed to escape but both his bonded lost their fathers today. Our family has two beautiful but vulnerable women and three children whose lives just seem to be made up of one shock after the other. I will not let ‘Black the tomcat’ or ‘Sirius the marauder’ into their lives. Mistress Lily knew there was a caring and loving man inside you trying to get out, which is why she allowed you to be Harry’s godfather. My family could use that man to help them get through this, I need Harry’s permission to bring you to the Manor but I will contact you tomorrow no matter what.”

Relief flooded through Sirius as he thanked the ‘woman’ in front of him, “Thank you Cas, I promise I won’t let you or Harry down.”

The look that Cas gave him back would have cracked granite, “Sirius you have to understand something, my love for my master and his bonded has changed me. Anyone hurting them is going to find themselves in a lot of pain. You know as a house elf I should not be able to do this but my master will be protected at all costs. Mistress Lily’s child and his bonded will live to see their grandchildren if I have anything to do with it, let this be a warning of how much they means to me.” Cas stood abruptly and shouted at Sirius, “How dare you sir, what kind of a girl do you think I am?” Her hand shot out and smacked Sirius with a force that made Minerva’s slap of Albus appear like a love tap.

Sirius ended up on the floor, sitting on his arse, having been knocked right out of his chair. He rubbed his face as Cas made her way out

the pub to much cheering and jeering but inside Sirius was smiling, if the pain in his jaw was any reflection on how much she loved his godson, then Harry was in very good hands. He'd tried to speak to James about the way Lily treated Cas, more like family than a servant, but he could now admit he was wrong. Sirius could see it in her eyes, Cas would kill to protect Harry and that was all right in his book. She repeatedly said Harry's bond mates indicting that his godson had bonded with two girls at age nine, this was something Sirius had to see. He swore a silent oath he would be the best wizard he could be because Harry deserved nothing but the best.

-oOoOo-

Fate had her book open at the page marked Luna Lovegood as the changes took place, her old life had Luna's mother dying and the child being raised by her father. Xeno's grief left him even less prepared to raise a daughter than Maia feared. He flung himself into work with his stories getting stranger by the issue while his daughter grew up lonely and confused. Hogwarts was a nightmare for the girl, considered strange and ridiculed for every little thing, it would be her fourth year before she met Harry and made any real friends. Her father's betrayal of Harry ended Luna's relationship with the man who later hanged himself, realizing he'd now lost the two most important things in the world to him.

Luna was now Mrs Potter and would grow up loved and cared for, her gift would be accepted by her bond mates as a wonderful thing, allowing her to blossom into the spectacular witch she would become.

The unexpected death of the Dursley boy allowed Fate some leeway and she'd used it to the max, Luna's gift and Hedwig's abilities had allowed Maia to be saved and play a major part in their upbringing.

Luna had lost ten years with her father but gained a husband and loving family, this may seem cruel but her father died at the height of his professional career and with the knowledge his wife and daughter loved him very much. His sacrifice ensured his daughter's future and Fate counted that as balanced, preferring to place Maia's miracle escape against another account.

The page headed Hermione Granger was also similar, she went through school friendless and only Harry saving her life changed that fact. Both were too emotionally stunted to see what was right in front of them and did nothing about it.

The magical world took over more and more of her life, letters home dropped to once a month and family holidays were abandoned to stay with her friends. When her parents were killed in an identical car accident in Australia they didn't even know they had a daughter, she'd wiped their memory to keep them safe. When Hermione went back to collect them and restore their memories, she broke down in the graveyard, finally realising what magic had cost her.

Hermione lost her drive to meet her potential, settling instead for marriage of convenience to a mediocre wizard and raising a few children, she would become a shadow of her former self, such was the fate of the smartest witch since Rowena Ravenclaw.

This time she would lose almost nine years with her father but be married to the man she truly loved. The man who, along with Luna would push and encourage her to realise that massive potential as a witch and mother. Again Dan's sacrifice ensured the two girls he loved futures, so Fate marked it balanced.

The miracle of Emma's escape and recovery would again be marked against another account, Fate was about to turn the page when Emma's name glowed. It would appear the healing tears of the phoenix had also healed her reproductive system, their recent bouts of lovemaking would indeed produce the offspring they had both wished for. Fate could only shake her head, she was aware that she was pushing the benefits to the max but how did this one sneak past her. Perhaps she was the first to realise that nothing could be discounted when dealing with the three Potters.

Turning the page to Harry Potter actually made her angry, it was enough of a burden having a prophesy hanging over your head without some old coot interfering.

He'd lost his parents and then spent over seven years in hell, he'd now lost the uncle, nephew and his aunt would die within the year, having lost the will to live.

Here she was able to add Hedwig, Maia, Emma and still didn't think it evened out. With Luna and Hermione at his side he now had a chance of, not only fulfilling the prophecy but also effecting change that would prevent the succession of a new dark lord for centuries to come.

Fate considered her tinkering a success, two good men had to lose years from their lifespan but both daughters would prosper and their wives lifespan's extended to include become grandmothers many times over, faced with the alternative Fate believed both Dan and Xeno would have agreed to that deal. She, on the other hand was dealing with the fate of the world here, Dumbledore, like Riddle was a minor annoyance and would be dealt with when the time was right. These three children would grow to become the greatest leaders of the light since Merlin himself and start a dynasty that would prosper for millennia. Fate intended to sit back with some popcorn and enjoy the show.

-oOoO-

Peter White sat reading the article that had just claimed tomorrow's front page, Rita was going from strength to strength with her reporting.

Would You Return to This?

It was only Sunday when the Quibbler broke the most important story since Halloween 1981, the Boy Who Lived was Alive!

Like everyone else I celebrated the fall of the dark wizard but I think I celebrated more with the news our saviour was still amongst us. This apparently was not a view shared by everyone.

The evidence for that statement is that Monday morning saw Xeno Lovegood, the Quibbler's owner and editor murdered by death eater Lucius Malfoy in the newspaper's own office.

The fact that death eaters live amongst us, posing as respected members of our community, was further confirmed by the recently captured Peter Pettigrew. Under the influence of truth serum he admitted all his crimes but also revealed that Lucius Malfoy was he-who-must-not-be-named's chief lieutenant. Malfoy was also responsible for recruiting Peter to the death eater ranks, a feat that led directly to the Potter's murder.

At the same time as Xeno was losing his life, the Lovegood residence was burned to the ground with the dark mark making a re-appearance for the first time since Harry vanquished its creator. Maia Lovegood was a potions mistress who worked from home and it is suspected that both she and her eight-year-old daughter Luna were present when their home burned to the ground. The fire was so intense not even evidence survived the inferno.

In his interview Harry alluded to having two best friends and speculation is rife that one of them was young Luna, if that is the case then I fear we may never see our saviour again. Which brings me back to the title of my story, if this was your life and, in addition to all that has gone before, death eaters had just murdered your best friend, would you return to a world in such a state as ours?

Death eaters claim they represent blood purity but have just murdered a family of pure bloods.

There is already a movement to return Dumbledore to the Wizengamot but he's had his chance, we've just tried two supposed deceased death eaters that escaped punishment on his watch, one of them was even awarded the Order of Merlin!

It's time to reopen all the old 'I was under the Imperius curse' cases and try the people involved using truth serum, like it should have been done in the first place. People who were under this curse have nothing to fear as our laws rightly gives protection to those used by this vile unforgivable. Let's remove any shadow of doubt from the fine, upstanding victims of this curse and clear their names once and for all.

I fear only by setting our world in order will we ever see our saviour again but this reporter is not for giving up, I refuse to let mask wearing cowards frighten me or prevent my reporting from stating the truth. I publicly offer to meet with Harry at the venue / time of his choice and give my magical oath I will die rather than betray his trust.

Harry Potter rid us of the dark lord but we couldn't even deal with his minions, for the continued security of our world this has to change. I for one am ready to do my part, are you?

The End

A/N Thanks for reading

From the very first paragraph it was always my intention to end the story here, as a Pre-Hogwarts tale. I'm considering writing their school years as a FG - part 2, though I need to get the storyline in my head before beginning.

Note: Steel Bull Bars were eventually made illegal in the UK due to the high number of casualties and fatalities they produced when involved in accidents.

UPDATE: FG2 - The Trio Hit Hogwarts now posted